



BeSwitched

KaraLynne Mackrory



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To a chroí (my heart) for all the magic you bring into my life

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About the Author

Also by KaraLynne Mackrory



Emissary

Mortals can be such pesky beings. They are always making a mull of their destinies, changing the course of nature, disrupting their fates—all with such disregard to the vast amount of work it causes me. The gentry, they call themselves. Ha! Yet there is nothing gentle about the way they barrel through their temporal lives, leaving their fates among the debris in the wake. And who is to clean up the disorder created by these mortals? Who is to place them back upon their correct course? Their assigned Emissary of course.

As I sit here perched above these havoc makers, I cannot help but wistfully think back on the days of my youth. Morosely, I wish that back then Fortuna had seen in me a spirit of Nature or even Academia. I am sure I would have been very good at those callings. I do not believe I am fooling myself to believe I have in me what it

takes to be a Nature. I could imagine myself being quite happy given charge of the seasons—changing the winds and waking the flowers each day with gentle encouragement as the sun rose. Yes, I could be quite contented with the flora. I am fairly certain I could develop a green thumb if given half a chance.

Or perhaps an Academia, guiding young minds with whisperings of ideas in their thoughts—expanding their knowledge and shepherding the course of human achievement. Yes, I would have excelled in this realm. A friend from my youth was designated as an Academia and is quite smugly responsible for the invention of Cartwright's power loom! I could be an Academia, I am certain of it.

I might even go as far as to consider myself capable of being a Nurture, though children do frighten me with their antics. It seems mortal children are as apt to kill themselves as their grown counterparts are apt at unseating the course of their fates. The children's smells though! The stench those tiny humans can create—unbelievable works of dark magic. It is a testament to the level of vexation I feel right now to even consider I could get used to the odours of children.

Heaving a great sigh, I send an annoyed glare towards the objects of my dissatisfaction.

No, I suppose it is useless to wish for that which cannot be or never was. Fortuna, with her omniscient powers, looked into my heart and saw the spirit of an Emissary. So, it is for me to be the broker, the intermediary between the fates and the mortals. The fixer, as many among my type call it. This term produces in me a chagrined laugh. Fixer indeed! It is for me to reorder the mortals' paths and put them back on course with what has been destined for them. Sometimes it is as simple as nudging a second son towards the rectory instead of the militia. In most cases, it means correcting the path of love, for love is such an integral part of the tapestry of mortal lives.

And well, truthfully, Fortuna is never wrong, and I am an Emissary in my heart and in my soul. It is not mere satisfaction when I see the mortals assigned to me correct their paths and achieve their happiness by following their true destinies. It produces in me a feeling of powerful contentment. I guess you could say I like order, and you would not be wrong. However, I believe it is more than that. As pesky as these mortal beings are,

they grow on you after a few hundred years. I might almost say they are endearing if I were in a more generous mood.

But generous is not what I am feeling now. Glancing down at my ledger, I am fuming. If I were a Nature, you better believe the winds I would stir up would become a most fearsome storm. For underneath the names of my current assignments are two new ones. Normally, I have only one assignment at a time. Or two at the most, if love is in the mix of it. And from my perch among the rafters of this ballroom, I can see that these new names are really due to the wreckage created by the first names on my list. It is not enough that these mortals must wreak havoc upon their own fates, but they have to go about botching others' fates as well sometimes. It is quite enough to drive a young sprite mad. And I am not young.

Reaching into my vest pocket, I procure myself a treat to calm my ire. The bitter, savoury sweet taste of liquorice fills my senses, and I can feel myself float back down to rest upon the rafter once again. Intense emotions often cause even the most experienced of mythical creatures, as I am myself, to lose track of our magic a little. Why do you think there are so many 'accidental' fires? Embers have ferocious tempers.

Once again able to countenance the troublesome mortals below, I focus on the two who were first on my list. And here I thought I was making some progress with this pair. Disappointment floods my heart. Never have I had such a difficult assignment.

These are they, the irrational creatures: one proud gentleman by the name of Fitzwilliam Darcy and an equally prejudiced lady by the name of Elizabeth Bennet. The first and only assignments I have ever had who were seemingly fighting their fate rather than just muddling it up.

In addition, it seems one of them may be responsible for setting others off their course. Glancing at the new names in my ledger, I know them immediately. The additions to my list are Jane Bennet and the gentleman's friend, Charles Bingley. I cannot imagine Elizabeth doing anything to jar these last two off their paths. I know from my work with her that she is most in favour of her sister's future with Mr Bingley. No, it must be that blasted Darcy again!

How many times must I set this man right? I placed him in line with Elizabeth to dance at the assembly, and he insults her. I placed him in her path countless times, and he botched the whole affair quite thoroughly each time. Can he not see what is right in front of

him? Now I know I have progressed far enough as to stir up some fascination with her. He certainly studies her intently. But someone needs to tell this gentleman from Derbyshire that true love never develops under such a glare!

I even stooped so low—and I must admit that usually I do not allow myself the use of such underhanded tactics—as to convince a Healer to ignore a little tickle in Miss Jane Bennet's throat last week. As a result, Jane did fall ill while at Netherfield, as planned. Elizabeth hastened to her side, as planned. And I, believing my assignment would soon be completed, submitted my request to Above for a much-needed holiday. To ensure the deal was quite decided, I even arranged for Darcy to spend a potentially productive thirty minutes alone with Elizabeth in the Netherfield library.

That was not as easy as you may think either. You try keeping a determined Miss Bingley away from Darcy without using a bit of magic. I will not feel ashamed of the underhanded mischief I employed there. That woman was determined to find her prey, and that chambermaid really did need to empty that pot when she did. I simply whispered to one to walk along the path below the window in search of Darcy and to the other to do her duties. Very little magic needed; a beginner's spell, really. And I did Miss Bingley a favour too; that gown was horrific. With a flick of my wrist, I push the amusing image away to again focus.

Of course, my holiday would be denied because my assignments—those clueless mortals!—did not correct their course. I set up his fate before him quite nicely in the lovely form of Miss Elizabeth Bennet being a guest in the same home as him. And for all my efforts? Nothing. If I were not such a seasoned sprite, I would think that someone at Above had these two wrong and their destinies were not meant to be combined.

It all makes me want to swoop down upon their heads and hit those two hard objects together, hopefully knocking a little sense into them. Alas I cannot, for despite being imperceptible to all mortals, such behaviour is not befitting at a ball, especially such a fine one at Netherfield.

My gaze travels from the gentleman to the lady. Not that Miss Elizabeth has been very helpful herself. For such a bright young miss, she certainly has her fair share of vanity. I pride myself in a thorough study of my assignments and am ashamed to say I missed this strain of her character. She believed that worthless mortal

Wickham's lies about Darcy because he complimented her when they first met and Darcy did not. Since then, she has set herself against her fate with Darcy.

Just remembering her encounters with Wickham sets my teeth grinding. I pull out another piece of liquorice to chew on, and it instantly settles the churning in my stomach. Livid with Wickham's interference with my subjects, I had immediately filed a complaint with Above against whichever lazy sprite was in charge of Wickham's fate, for he was quite completely bungling up the fates of my subjects with his lies, and somebody ought to do their job and fix it! However, much to my surprise and fury, I was informed that no action would be taken against Wickham's Emissary, for that loathsome mortal was on his correct path. For, as surprising as it was for me to learn, his fated path was to set others adrift from their paths. Just my luck—the only mortal I have ever encountered whose destiny was such happens to aim his work at my posting.

"Mortals!" I scoff.

Currently, my original two assignments are still dancing together. When Mr Darcy first requested a dance of Miss Elizabeth, I finally felt as if I might see this post put to rest. Hallelujah! As a result, I immediately took up my perch here in the rafters to watch it all unfold. Truth be told, this is the moment that assures me I am meant to be an Emissary, for I love to see the mortals step onto their correct path.

They were dancing so beautifully together that it was impossible, I thought, for them to not see their destinies in each other's eyes. He certainly was enjoying her presence, and although I detected a bit of reluctance to accept on her part, I still hoped this was the beginning of a resolution for these two.

I was just settling my back more comfortably against the exposed beam, a serene smile upon my features, when my ledger chimed against my hip. Confused, I pulled it out and that's when I saw the new names added to my assignment list. Mr Darcy is on a course to upset the fates of two other people, and it is my responsibility to fix it. Seething, I counted to ten before allowing myself to look upon my original subjects. When I did, I beheld Mr Darcy frowning as his eyes burned a path towards Bingley and Jane, while Sir William prattled on beside my two subjects, oblivious to the fact that they should be dancing. They should be falling into their correct path. He should bloody well shut his—one, two, three,

four...

Listening, I could hear Sir William allude to Bingley and Jane's upcoming weaving of tapestries. It surprises me that this should cause such displeasure to show upon the handsome features of Mr Darcy, but it appears the idea does not meet with his approval. Trouble is, mortals do not get a say in their fates—that's not for them to decide. And a good thing too. It doesn't bear considering what could happen if they could. I shudder.

It seems Darcy has plans to set his friend and Miss Bennet's fates off their predestined course, otherwise their names would not be on my list.

Hundreds of years at this job, and I had yet to have such recalcitrant subjects. And while many Emissaries use magic to steer their witless mortals back onto their correct paths, I rarely have had to resort to it (Miss Bingley and the chamber-pot aside). Magic is all well and good, and can even be a bit of fun sometimes. But I was trained in the old arts. New Emissaries just out of university these days depend on their magic—they never learned to finesse a subject without it. It's a shame really. That is not to say I do not sprinkle the occasional dusting of Attraction. For these mortals would probably find themselves extinct if I did not. It is a matter of pride really. I ought to be able to do my job without resorting to controlling the humans with magic. It might be harder, but I enjoy the triumph I feel when I see the necessary correction made with just the right kind of nudging and arranging of encounters to get the job done. Not all humans are entirely stupid.

But these two... Drawing a deep breath, I hold it and look upon my subjects again. I am usually a very imperturbable sprite, but these two have pushed my patience to the limit, and I admit that I foresee months more of this chaotic fighting of their fates. Months! I could nearly cry in frustration. My mind easily conjures up their next year, and I know that the path these two may take me on is bound to give me a megrim if not push me into retirement.

Maybe I am losing my touch. Maybe I ought to step back and let the younger Emissaries take over. But I am only barely four hundred years old. Way too young to be thinking of hanging up my satchel but definitely too old for silly nonsense.

Determined, I expel a slow breath while an idea settles into my exhausted mind. It would be quite wicked, yet I cannot help the satisfaction I feel just thinking of it. I really ought not to do it, but I

can already feel a devious smile tug at the edges of my lips. It might be cruel, bordering on immoral perhaps. My palm covers my mouth, which most assuredly is forming a mischievous smile. If nothing else, it would pay me back with infinite entertainment from these two. Hopefully it will teach them to appreciate the other for once too.

The only thing giving me pause now is Above. For I know it will most assuredly cause quite the commotion in the offices there. It is unconventional, to be sure, and I am certain to hear something from Above about it. But technically, it is quite within the rules of engagement to which I am bound. Could I? Should I?

I cannot help it; laughter bubbles up through my chest, and I am overcome with the idea. These two naughty mortals need a lesson in humility. Their fates are destined together, and this Emissary has frankly had it with their antics. I want and deserve my holiday. While I ponder the idea, I recall a lovely Irish nymph up north I have been meaning to call on, and that settles it in my mind. These two shall learn to appreciate each other, and they shall find their tapestries interwoven in the end—so help me...

As Mr Darcy leads Miss Elizabeth off the dance floor towards the refreshments, I smile as I see my opportunity. I rub my hands together and stretch my neck preparing to do the deed. With a flick of my hand, a sparkling swirl of dust settles on them. Mr Darcy's jaw is tight as he procures them both a glass from an arriving footman. He says something to her, and her response darkens his brow further. Now is my time.

With a focused stare I speak the magic's proclamation:

*"Fate's path you've fought too much.
A kiss of humility you will taste;
When the glass, your lips do touch.
Be prepared for two souls displaced."*



Souls Displaced

Darcy led Elizabeth off the floor, his features stony. Winding her towards the refreshments, he hailed a nearby footman and retrieved a glass of punch for each of them. The flush of her face was by no means attributed to his company or the exertions of the dance, and well he knew it. She was angry at him, and quite frankly, he was none too pleased with the lady either.

Turning towards Elizabeth, Darcy presented her glass as he spoke in terse tones.

“I would wish that you were not to sketch my character at the present moment as there is reason to fear that the performance would reflect no credit on either.”

Elizabeth’s displeasure at his words was clear upon her lovely features, and while Darcy was beginning to desire nothing but distance from her bewitching body, he could not look away. *Why is*

it that a beautiful woman made angry is even more alluring?

“But if I do not take your likeness now, I may never have another opportunity.”

Her unique mix of tart and sweet infused the words, and Elizabeth, knowing she was pushing the gentleman’s patience quite thoroughly, nevertheless found pleasure in the provocation.

They stood together side by side, each holding a glass of punch in silence for only a moment longer. Elizabeth could tell he wished to say something more, and while she determined to leave him in search of Jane or Charlotte ere long, she was curious to hear what he might say. Besides, the turmoil on his features was clear and the impenetrable Mr Darcy, befuddled, was a sight to behold.

Darcy was indeed fighting a great battle with a number of colossal feelings within his breast. A portion, a very great portion, of him wished to take Elizabeth bodily by the shoulders and scold her like a child. *Wickham? Really?* But he supposed it signified little if she was beguiled by the scoundrel since Darcy was resolved to leave on the morrow for London. Another troubling sentiment was keeping him from laying hands on her; there was a significant likelihood that if he were to do so, he would end up pulling her in for a bruising kiss. What he could not decide was which she deserved more and which he desired more.

So instead, he stood there with his glass in hand debating until he could take it no more and coldly replied, “I would by no means suspend any pleasure of yours.”

Elizabeth’s lips smirked ever so slightly as she tipped her head in acknowledgement. United in their desire to end their debate, both turned away to leave. At that moment, a clumsy footman returning an empty biscuits tray to the kitchens bumped into another arriving footman and the result was a loud clatter of silver as both trays and footmen went down. Elizabeth and Darcy were startled by the sound and, by coincidence, happened to both have their glasses raised to their lips for a drink just as the incident occurred.

They locked gazes briefly before, with a slight curtsy and a raised brow, they turned from the other with finality, tipping their glasses back in long pulls.

A flash of pain jolted through Darcy in the strangest of fashions. His eyesight went dark for only a second just as the pain left him. In that moment, he would later recall hearing only the sound of a strange high-pitched laugh and the smell of liquorice. Immediately,

he deposited his glass on a nearby stand, raising his hand to rub along his temple where the pain, now gone, had begun.

His fingers unaccountably encountered satin and grasping at the fabric, he pulled it forward before his face. He felt a tugging sensation as the satin, a pale lavender-coloured ribbon, sliced through his hair to follow his hand.

Once again the sounds and sights of the ballroom evaporated, his vision focusing on the scene immediately before him, jarring as it was. Fitzwilliam Darcy could see before his very eyes that the hand he was using to remove the strange bit of feminine flipper from his hair was not his own white-gloved hand but a delicate one encased in gloves of a colour matching the soft ribbon wrapped around his fingers.

Eyes bulging, his gaze slid along the length of the glove to find it attached to slim and bare arms! In shock, his gaze travelled up those slim arms to encounter not his own broad masculine shoulders covered in black tailcoat but the cap sleeves of a white fabric gown embroidered with tiny purple flowers.

A tickle of awareness skittered across his mind as he recognised the dress, but the shock was churning his insides so acutely as to render the mental recall of no significance. It was impossible that he was seeing what he was seeing, yet his eyes continued to travel, each new unexpected image leading to the next. It was all wrong. Wrong, wrong, wrong! Travelling past the feminine shoulders, his eyes wandered disbelievingly until he, looking directly down at himself, beheld a sight beyond alarming. A sight that caused his gentlemanly honour to immediately and gratefully break through the fog in his mind and prompt his head (and eyes) to snap upwards.

Closing his eyes tightly, Darcy felt the uprising tide of panic surge into his heart, the crashing unreality of what he had seen with his own eyes flooding ever upwards until he felt certain he would drown in the sensation. Something was terribly wrong. His vision—it had to have been altered in some way, perhaps a blow to the head he could not remember. *Something!* For no other explanation would account for why he was seeing through the eyes of a decidedly female body.

The turmoil was making him lightheaded, and for the first time in his life, Darcy had the unsettling feeling he might swoon. Opening his eyes to ward off such an event, he first kept his view at

the rafters of the ballroom before gaining sufficient courage to tip his head lower again.

Heaving, fearful breaths were wracking his body—no, not his!—and once more Darcy tore his gaze upwards, his cheeks heating in what he knew with a sinking heart was a very definite blush. Suddenly aware of his surroundings, he looked around frantically to see who might be witnessing this most illogical and horrifying situation. All the other guests at the ball were dancing obliviously or conversing among themselves, giving Darcy hope that they were unaware of anything amiss with the gentleman of Derbyshire.

A movement beside him startled Darcy out of his disjointed thoughts. He turned wide eyes to the newly arrived Miss Lucas, fear wrapping its claws around his throat to have such direct attention. Did she know? Could she tell of what otherworldly trick he was now victim?

“Lizzy, your ribbon has come out. Come, I will help you repair the damage before anyone notices.”

Stumbling back at the illogical speech, Darcy bumped into a pillar behind him, his strength beginning to seep from him. His head shook in jerking movements, his eyes still wide with horror as he looked about the room again, this time with a single-minded pursuit.

There, only feet from where he had stood with Elizabeth Bennet, was the familiar face and body he ought to possess—the eyes wide with the same terror and mirroring the expression he expected might be on this body he was inside. What a strange experience it was to look upon oneself as if in a looking glass; seeing your body as it would appear to you while knowing there was no such glass. His eyes roamed over his body and returned unbelievably to lock gazes with it. He did not know how it happened, but Darcy was grappling with the possibility that he no longer inhabited his own body but that of Elizabeth Bennet.

He stood there staring at himself, his own body staring back at him. Muscles ridged with paralysed disbelief at the sight until he felt a hand slip around the arm of the body he was in and tug him to the side.

“I declare, Lizzy, Mr Darcy does look at you quite incessantly. You cannot now deny it.”

Darcy twisted to look at Miss Lucas, surprised to hear his name and more than a little embarrassed to know she believed she was

speaking to her friend when she uttered it. So startled by it was he, that he allowed Miss Lucas to walk him quite a distance before he pulled them to a stop.

“Miss Lucas...” he began and then stopped abruptly. Covering his mouth with a hand, he did not expect the deep timbre of his voice to be gone, replaced with the dulcet tones of *her* voice spoken by him.

“Miss Lucas? Oh Lizzy, what nonsense is this?” Miss Lucas laughed and continued their walk.

She was laughing at him. This final blow sent him reeling once again. The sheer impact upon his faculties allowed for Miss Lucas to lead him along out of the ballroom. What fantastical joke was this? What evil was upon him that would make him inhabit Elizabeth’s body and not his own? It had to have been some hallucination, some temporary breach with sanity. He reviewed the last half an hour and could not account for what might have caused this to happen to him.



* * *

As soon as the pain subsided, which, truth be told, lasted only a second, Elizabeth’s vision returned and the room appeared light once again. Immediately, she knew something was wrong. Looking about her, she felt as if her vantage was off. There, a few feet from her, were Kitty and Lieutenant Hammond, anticipating the next set. But she could easily observe, tucked in the top of her sister’s hair, the pearl comb Elizabeth had lent her earlier that evening. Even the lieutenant’s stature was off, for she could look over his shoulders. Normally Elizabeth stood shorter than even Kitty.

Expecting to have stepped up on some stool, though having no memory of it, Elizabeth looked towards the floor. Staring down, she waited several minutes for the image to rearrange itself into a more

logical picture. Gone were her slippers and gone were her skirts. In their place, she found herself in command of a pair of legs in tight black breeches, stark white silk stockings, and leather dancing pumps. Not entirely without her faculties despite the impossibility of her vision, she noted they were an exceptionally fine pair of legs.

She quickly averted her eyes up and away, having looked upon the legs too long, only to find the rest of her body likewise clad in masculine fashion—waistcoat, superfine black tail coat, and lastly, a silk cravat.

When she had first felt the flash of light and jarring pain through her temple, she thought perhaps her dance with Darcy had upset her so much as to cause the beginnings of a megrim. With a quick glance again at the new body she possessed, feeling awkward in the long limbs and breeches, Elizabeth wished heartily to only be having a megrim. This was some cruel hallucination of sorts. Despite the turmoil she felt, up until this point, she had enough power over her composure to exhibit a bored, even mien. Although her mind was in uproar over this horrifying development, she was determined that the world around her would not know it.

To all around her, she appeared perfectly fine. Perfectly fine until she again lifted her glass to her lips and encountered large white-gloved hands holding it. She nearly dropped the glass right then, so quickly did she lose regulation, but her new body possessed quick reflexes and was able to catch the crystal before it fell to the ground or spilled so much as a drop.

Another subtle inspection of her entire frame soon followed. Surely this was some illusion that would soon go away. However, she was again shocked senseless at the immodesty of having legs that were not safely hidden behind skirts. It was not until she looked up to lock eyes with her own body a few paces off that she realised just whose body she possessed. Not that any of it made any sense to her, but she had the presence of mind to be quite annoyed at the identity of her new frame.

Gazes frozen, it was clear to her that his shock and horror matched her own. Inside her body was none other than Fitzwilliam Darcy. And she inside his. The alarm of it all still held her captive while her friend Charlotte carried off Darcy. It was some time before she made to follow—marvelling at the distance one could travel in so short a time with such long legs—in search of Darcy and her body. Much to her rising panic, her pursuit was waylaid by

her ridiculous cousin accosting her in the middle of the ballroom.

Mr Collins had bowed low, too low she was sure. Elizabeth was fairly certain that it was not just the tall frame of Darcy's body that made her able to see the back of Collins's head. Her cousin, despite having not been introduced to Mr Darcy previously, proceeded to introduce himself!

"Mr Darcy, sir. It is an honour for me to be privileged with the opportunity to speak with you tonight. It is with the greatest of humility that I present myself to you, sir, as the most fortunate rector of Hunsford, having been given the post by your most illustrious and wise aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh."

Elizabeth stared, stunned at the audacity of her cousin. She nearly bent to whisper her rebuke of him for his pomposity when she was reminded forcefully of her new corporeal state.

Clearing her throat, which was just as unsettling an experience as everything else thus far, Elizabeth attempted to mimic Mr Darcy when she said, "Pardon me, what is your name, sir?"

Resisting the urge to rub her throat—for the vibration of Darcy's deep voice floating out of her was astonishing even though she knew to expect it—Elizabeth bent her head regally at her cousin. He had waylaid her, and she wished very much at that moment to excuse herself and find Darcy. Certain the only way to draw as little attention to herself as possible was to behave as normally as she was able in Darcy's body, Elizabeth resigned herself to speak with her inconvenient cousin.

Mr Collins, after supplying his name and title, spent a great deal of time assuring the person he believed to be Mr Darcy that his aunt, Lady Catherine, was in the very best of health. Every minute he continued to converse with Elizabeth, her impatience to be gone grew. While he spoke, she took advantage of her new tall frame to look around for her body. When Mr Collins began to explain his desire to form an alliance with his cousin to mend the breach between their fathers, Elizabeth's attention snapped back to him.

"Lady Catherine advised me of such a scheme, and I admit I am not loath to fulfil her most wise counsel, for you have seen my cousins, and they are loveliness all."

Elizabeth stood stunned at such a speech. She suspected given his continued attention that Mr Collins may have developed a *tendre* for her, but this new revelation was dreadful in the extreme.

In the following few minutes Elizabeth saw her ire at losing

Darcy turn to relief. Mr Collins resumed his previous discourse and regaled her—and the several people standing about listening in—with never-ending praise for Mr Darcy’s aunt. She happened to glance aside only for her eyes to encounter Miss Bingley and her condescending look of pity. Silently, Elizabeth thanked whatever otherworldly mischief had caused their souls to switch places, if only to escape the mortification that Mr Collins might have had this interlude with the real Mr Darcy. It did not, however, save her from witnessing the triumph Miss Bingley felt in seeing it.

It was too much, and she could tolerate no more. A quick dismissal of her cousin, and Elizabeth was again looking about for her body.



* * *

The bubbling sounds of ladies’ chatter seeped into his awareness soon but not soon enough to prevent him from being led by Miss Lucas right into the centre of the ladies’ retirement room.

“I must protest,” he declared vehemently. “I ought not to be in here!” He frantically searched for a safe place to settle his eyes, for there were ladies in every direction adjusting their hair, their shawls, and their bodices. Elizabeth’s friend, with another laugh and surprising strength, waved away his concern and pushed him into a seat at a dressing table.

“Your next partner shall not have to wait but a moment, Lizzy. Give me that ribbon. I shall replace it, and you may once again be on your way to the dance floor.”

His eyes were round with concern and no little amount of internal discomfort assailed him—his sense of gentlemanly honour protesting loudly in his ears—but he was rendered immobile at the reflection in the looking glass before him. Elizabeth’s stunning features, her rosy cheeks, rounded lips, and that adorable dimple

just visible in the way her lips pinched together, stared back at him. Darcy met the eyes of the reflection, those fine eyes he admired so well. Despair began to swallow him up for in those lively eyes he also saw his own terror—he felt he could see his own soul behind them, trapped in the body of the woman he admired.

His eyes shied away from the mirror, feeling ashamed to have for a moment looked upon it as a man might. There were no words to describe such a feeling. Darcy felt wrong and unnatural and unfamiliar with the movements of this body. The thought that he might inhabit her body for any length of time at all sent terror through him, for how was he to be a gentleman and still command her body?

Standing abruptly, he turned; Miss Lucas stepped back with surprise at his sudden movement.

“Pardon me, I must get some air.”

He made to move past her when her hand found his—the sensation of holding another person’s hand just for the sake of holding it was entirely new to him as men did not do such things.

“Are you well, Lizzy? You are flushed and acting strangely.”

Darcy looked about him and noticed many of the other inhabitants of the room had ceased their chatter too, and they were looking at him unabashedly. A thought came to mind: if he were to have any chance of escaping this room on his own, he would have to act naturally. That is, as Elizabeth would. A wry smile lifted his lips as he thought, easily done in her body.

“Yes, allow me to apologise...” Darcy wracked his mind for her Christian name, knowing it was told him upon their first introduction. Elizabeth would call her friend by her name and not so formally. “Charlotte!”

He saw her head pull back minutely at his enthused recitation of her name. Taking a calming breath, he tried again. “Yes, I am well. Only I am in need of a little refreshment and some air perhaps. Thank you for...for doing what you did with my hair.” He waved a hand vaguely about his head, having seen from the mirror the ribbon replaced amongst the chestnut curls.

“I will go with you then.”

Thankfully, before Darcy could protest, Miss Maria Lucas miraculously appeared at her sister’s side.

“Charlotte, can you help me with my flounce? Lieutenant Davis trod upon it, and it has torn.” Her voice was annoyed, but turning

towards Darcy she continued, “You look pretty, Lizzy.”

Darcy, still unused to hearing himself called by Elizabeth’s name, fell into an awkward curtsy, and then immediately regretted it for the strange looks both Lucas sisters then gave him.

“Thank you.” He stumbled out, and when Charlotte turned to inspect the damage to her sister’s gown, he made his swift exit.

He hastened to place distance between himself and anyone, struggling mightily with the shortened steps he was required to take in the long folds of the gown. How ladies wore such heaps of fabric about their legs was beyond him. He felt as if he had been wrapped in bed clothes.

Darcy knew he needed to speak with Elizabeth. He expected that she would be looking for him as well, but Miss Lucas had successfully pulled him away before they could discover what strange magic had befallen them.

As soon as he entered the ballroom, Darcy lifted up on his toes to attempt to locate her over the heads of all the other guests. Blast, but it was impossible to see anything. Coming down on his heels again, he levelled a frustrated glare at his new corporeal state. He had always felt that Elizabeth was nearly the perfect height—certainly perfect for him—however not so much for seeing atop the heads of dancing occupants of a ballroom! For the first time he contemplated how much easier certain parts of life had been for him due to his tall frame. After another fruitless stretch to his tiptoes, Darcy went flat-footed again in irritation.

He began to weave around the side of the room, peeking where he might in between standing guests and dancing couples until at once he spied her across the room from him.



* * *

Elizabeth realised how easily she could see across the entire room

from this vantage, because it was not long before she saw Darcy enter the ballroom again. So startling was it to see her body move between and around people without having command of it. Before long, their eyes met, and suddenly, an invisible tightly bound cord about her chest squeezed, and she felt a pull unmistakably draw her towards Darcy.

As she walked, nervousness led her to run her hands down her frame as she might to smooth her dress. The action sent her mind spiralling, for it was not a ball gown's gossamer fabric that she encountered but the hard lines of a muscular abdomen, hip, and thigh. Good heavens! How improper, this mystic switch.



* * *

The moment their eyes connected, his entire being felt stretched, swept up and compelled towards her. He saw her step away from the pillar against which she had been resting and move towards him as if bewitched by that same force. A rise of pleasure entered into his chest at the idea that Elizabeth felt what he felt. A minute later, the realisation that of course they would be drawn to each other—their souls had been displaced within the other—paid level to that same pleasure. But alas, Darcy would not get to her that easily.

Before he could traverse even a quarter of the length to her, and she to him, he nearly collided with the tall frame of a gentleman standing in his path. Lifting his head to give a cutting retort for the man to better mind himself, Darcy's words died in his mouth when he felt the young man dare put forth hands on Darcy's arms as if to steady him. It was Elizabeth's body and this man held it in his arms! The instant revulsion forced Darcy to step back—distracted momentarily from his determined course to reach Elizabeth. Ridiculously angered that this gentleman of no name dared to place

his hands upon Elizabeth's person, Darcy once again opened his mouth to rebuke the man only to stop short.

'Remove your hands immediately from Miss Elizabeth' would sound absurd spoken in the dulcet tones of the woman herself. The volley between his thoughts and his proprietary feelings towards the body that did not belong to him—but that he now occupied—continued to stun him and further increase the desperation he felt to reach Elizabeth and sort out this supernatural mess.

"There you are! I wondered if I was going to have to forfeit this set," spoke the gentleman.

Darcy studied the man, frantically gathering thoughts to form words that Elizabeth might say in the situation while compelling this body he borrowed to not show Darcy's jealousy and anger upon its features. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed that Elizabeth had nearly reached him, and with a sigh of relief, he turned toward the gentleman.

"Please excuse me. I believe Mr Darcy wishes to speak to me."

"Eliza, I believe this is our dance. Mr Darcy will oblige us our set first, I am sure."

Eyes widening, Darcy turned from the gentleman—his mind recognising him but not placing the name—and settled a telling, pleading glare on Elizabeth. Then remembering the young upstart's overly familiar appellation, Darcy returned his glare to the man.



* * *

Despite the urgency she felt in needing to speak to Darcy, Elizabeth could not help but feel the sudden humour of the situation. Unable to withstand the delight and pleasure she knew she would find in watching Darcy dance with her childhood friend, Elizabeth disobliged him and all but pushed them on to the dance floor where she expected to enjoy a full half an hour of merriment at his

expense.

“Oh! Then I am interrupting. Forgive me, Mr Lucas. I only wished to tell Miss Elizabeth that her sister has tasked me with the message that she awaits her in the library after this set.”



* * *

Was she really implying that Darcy should dance with the man? It took but a glimpse of his pursed lips, the sparkle of his eyes to know that Elizabeth was indeed encouraging such an embarrassment, in fact she found great humour in it.

“If my sister is in need of me, I should not tarry for the dance. I hope you will understand, Mr Lucas,” Darcy ground out, barely concealing the simmering within.

Astonished, Darcy could not believe his ears when Elizabeth, in his body, interjected: “Not at all, Miss Elizabeth. I am told she does not wish to *suspend any pleasure of yours* and wishes you to come to her after the dance.”

Unbelievable! Elizabeth was actually forcing Darcy to dance with this man! He understood the library assignation was for the two of them, but why would she delay resolving this mess with a dance?

Mr Lucas laughed, drawing both Darcy and Elizabeth’s focus from each other to himself.

“What is this ‘mister,’ Eliza? Have we not always called each other by our Christian names?”

Jealousy surged. *Not if I have anything to say about it!* Darcy lifted his chin, stood taller—as much as the blasted corset allowed him to—and replied as hotly as he could, “We are grown now, it is not proper.”

His satisfaction cooled quickly at the look on his own face. Elizabeth obviously did not appreciate his set-down of her friend.

Well, he did not appreciate having to dance with the man!

Undeterred and laughing still, Mr Lucas said, "Come, Eliza, the line is forming."

Darcy could feel the heat entering his cheeks as Mr Lucas took his hand and gently began leading him towards the floor. Looking back, he saw with narrowed eyes that Elizabeth was vastly enjoying the whole spectacle.

When Mr Lucas led him to the ladies' side and then stood across from him, Darcy felt his heart begin to pound. He was really going to have to dance with this fellow, this callow youth who dared to call *his* Elizabeth by a familiar name. There was no way around it if he was to avoid drawing too much attention to himself. His humiliation would be complete.

When the movement began, he nearly compounded his shame by stepping forward with the gentlemen. He heard a slight baritone laugh behind him and knew that Elizabeth was enjoying every minute of this. His pride rankled, and he determined then that he would not give her an ounce more entertainment. Carefully Darcy adjusted his mind to the ladies' steps, and from then on was as graceful a dancer as Elizabeth herself, although the gall of having to reach for and hold hands with his partner never failed to leave Darcy without a sour taste.

Only once did he allow his chin to drop and his eyes to seek out Elizabeth standing off to the side. When he saw the mirth on her face—*his* face—his anger once again swelled inside him. She was laughing at him! And compounding it all, drawing not a few looks at the sight of such amusement on Mr Darcy's face.

Darcy ground his teeth and forced himself to relax. He loved her smile—her perfectly straight teeth. Someday he hoped to be placed back in his own body, and it was that thought that kept him from grinding her molars down to their stumps.

When the dance finally came to a close, Darcy looked up from his curtsy in time to see his own tall frame slip out the door towards the library. He thanked his partner prettily, the insincerity of it lifting his spirits a little, before he too made his way around the room slowly and slipped out the door after Elizabeth. His feet ached for his own well-made leather dancing slippers and not these paper-thin silk contraptions. How did the ladies manage to spend even one dance in them, let alone an entire evening?



Trouble with Above

Truly, I have not been so thoroughly entertained in two hundred years. Not since that one assignment in Lochcarron with the mysterious misplacement of that gentleman's kilt. No, this was vastly more enjoyable to watch and far more productive at restoring my spirits. Mortals and their sense of propriety made the switch I facilitated all the more delightful. You see, humans have this staunch sense of modesty, and don't get me wrong, I appreciate that they do, it is just that everyone frets so unnecessarily over the littlest things. They are often so fixated on what one wears that they forget to see what is inside. To see the poor sap, Darcy, flustered by the view of his now female body is something I will long cherish. The man could not look at himself without feeling indecent.

I will admit, displacing their souls is a bit extreme. I am sure there are other ways I could have forced those two into an

understanding. It would have been quite easy for me to lock them up in some room somewhere, but frankly, this is far more entertaining, and I am not in the least regretful of it. In fact, I should have thought of this sooner!

My laughter is uninhibited as I watch Darcy be pulled away by Miss Lucas. The look of shock and fear in his eyes will be a particular source of amusement for me for centuries to come, I am sure.

I am not quite able to enjoy the mental havoc barely concealed on Elizabeth's face as she examines her new body before I sense someone appear at my side.

With a sigh, I turn from the delightful scene of my two troublesome mortals to the not unexpected face of a Messenger. Now that is a plum assignment. Messengers need only pass along information from Above to the various sprites going about their duties on earth. Most of the time, they send it via a missive. I scoff inwardly at how easy they have it. I have heard of a few who were troubled by the sprites to whom they were sent to speak, which is how the saying 'do not kill the messenger' came about. But really, how hard could their calling be? They do not even interact with mortals at all, for fairie sake!

I am already reaching for another piece of liquorice when he opens his mouth to speak. Forestalling him, I say, "*Cad é an nóta tugtha?* What is it, note giver?"

I know this Messenger; he is actually a good bloke despite his calling. Alasdair and I are even something like friends. He hails from the same forest glen I do. I think our mothers may even be part of the same book club. Perhaps he did not deserve my derision. It is not as if he could help being called to his life any more than I could. Some sprites are just lucky.

"Come now, Emrys. You could not have expected you would not hear from Above over this little spell?"

Above is just the name for the leaders of my world. It is not really a description of their location, like heaven or some such earthly distinction. It is simply those in my world over people like me. Those above me in authority, you might say. Like Fortuna, who determines all sprites' callings. Generally, Above interferes very little with our work, for which I am grateful. Nobody wants some busybody meddling in their work. The mortals do enough interfering as it is.

I manage to refrain from saying what I wish to say by nibbling on another liquorice. It is a good thing I have a never-ending supply—thank you, magic—or else I might find myself quite put out this evening.

Heaving another annoyed sigh, I tear my eyes away from the scene below with my assignments, but not before seeing Elizabeth accosted by her buffoon of a cousin. Despite my company up in the rafters, my lips turn up in pleasure.

“Clearly you have a message for me from Above. What is it they have to say? If they want me to switch them back, I assure you I am not outside of protocol. I have been doing this a long time; I am no youngling. The Emissary Handbook states—”

“Calm yourself, Emrys,” he quickly cuts in. “Above is not questioning your decision regarding your assignments.”

Surprised, I sit back against the rafters and look at the Messenger. I was certain that they would wish me to reverse the spell. I half expected to be required to do so since, while theoretically within the bounds of my power and manipulation over mortals, this switch was unprecedented.

Something about the way he returns my gaze, however, does not put me at ease. The anxiety grows inside me again. Messengers have little fun in their lives, so they often make whatever mischief they can while doing their work.

“Spill it. I have little patience for your type. Do you know what kind of a time I have had with these two?”

I gesticulate towards the dancing mortals below, and before I know it, I am floating above the rafters again.

“Above just wants to be assured that you have thought through all the implications.” His voice is irritatingly devoid of emotion.

I do not respond until I have counted to ten three times and consumed no less than four full pieces of my favourite treat. I turn fatigued eyes to my companion.

“Really, Al, you know me. Let us not play these games. What implications are they concerned about?”

For the first time, the Messenger cracks a smile. He too is looking down upon the mortals, and the sight of his amusement reminds me once again he is one of my old friends. I follow his gaze to see that my two troublesome assignments are speaking and Darcy will be forced to dance a reel with Mr Lucas. Holy folklore, I could find myself becoming endeared to Miss Elizabeth were she not

actively trying to make my life difficult. Her brilliant manipulation of Darcy in making him dance warms my heart a little. That mortal has some mettle. It is uproarious to watch Darcy trying to conceal his shock and horror.

The Messenger speaks while relishing the same scene. "Above wants to know what you plan to do about their human needs?"

At first I am not sure I follow, but then I am distracted by the flick of another Emissary's hand some distance away dropping magic dust on another poor mortal below. You did not think I was the only sprite up here in the rafters, did you? This one has an assignment I see with one of the officers. Poor lad hasn't the confidence to ask one of the ladies to dance. It is a good choice of his Emissary to dust him with a little Courage to get the job done. I shake my head to return to the topic at hand.

"I have not altered their bodies at all. They can still eat and drink as they need."

Alasdair looks at me with a raised brow and a smirk. "And after they eat and drink, what do you think their poor bodies will need to do?"

I am stunned into realising that in all the years I have been an Emissary—and I have quite the record of successes—I have never once used magic without planning out all the effects of it. We share a smile and return our gazes below as I contemplate this new complication. While I was certainly within my purview to switch their souls, I am handily caught by a mortal truth. Humans are invariably plagued by the mundane with regard to their bodies.

I had not considered that Darcy and Elizabeth may need at some point to use the facilities, bathe, or change clothing. My shoulders slump, and I am beset with disappointment. What a fun experiment this was at first. Despite their naughty fighting against destiny, I have become a little fond of these two. I would not wish to mortify either one with having to endure the privy in the other's body.

Despite what it may seem, given the spell I have cast, I am not the sort of Emissary to toy unfeelingly with my mortals—disregarding their sense of honour and innate morals. Fairies have no such ghastly physical needs, which can be my only excuse in this case. With an exhausted groan, I prepare myself to undo the spell.

With surprise, I am stopped by the Messenger himself. "You must indeed have had your hands full with these two, for you are clearly tired."

“What do you mean?” I look at him, slightly offended.

“Em,” he says with significance. “Can you not find some other way around this?”

Here I sit, paused, ready to undo the spell, and cannot for the life of me think what he could mean. I must indeed be fatigued. Before I can come up with a retort, he speaks again.

“See here, I am not supposed to tell you this, but Above was impressed with your ingenuity. They are amused by the results and are interested to see this play out. Apparently, these two have fates that are irrevocably tied to one another. Above chose *you* specifically for this assignment.”

Despite his words, I am still inclined to simply reverse the spell and use a more traditional way to put these two souls on the right path. Perhaps adding quite a bit more Attraction to their daily mixture along with the heady dose of Curiosity with which I was already dousing them.

Alasdair’s stare pushes right at me as though he is waiting for me to come up with some brilliant solution. I break away to look down at my assignments once again.

They each managed to leave the ballroom and were on their way to the library. Preparing myself to follow them, I gather up my book in my satchel, pop a liquorice in my mouth, and speak around it to the Messenger.

“I will think on it. For now, tell Above to enjoy the show. I am not done with these two yet.”

With that, I jump off the rafters and fly swiftly past the other guests after the two bothersome humans at the top of my list. On my way out, I note Mr Bingley and Miss Jane Bennet are standing up to dance with each other once again. At least one set of assignments is not giving me trouble. Perhaps a little head-knocking is not altogether a bad idea for the other two.



Twisted Fates

Turning down the last corridor towards the library, Darcy came upon himself. That is, he came upon the body that belonged to him. Standing before him was his own perfectly tailored black evening jacket, snowy white cravat, and vest. As a man, he hated the restrictions such formal clothing forced upon him; however, as he looked upon his true self, he wanted nothing more than to feel the comforting coverage of his neckcloth. The bareness he felt below his jaw currently was choking him. Now, seeing himself—Elizabeth as himself—he experienced a sense of great relief as well as a renewal of that inexplicable draw he had felt from his chest towards Elizabeth before his dance with Mr Lucas.

“Please tell me what is going on, sir!”

Darcy could not mistake the pleading in the voice—the masculine voice.

He had to be sure, and after having enough presence of mind to look about him to ensure they were alone, he said, "Miss Elizabeth?"

"Yes, it is me! Who else? What have you done, sir?"

Reaching pale lavender-gloved hands towards Elizabeth, he wrapped them around the muscular upper arm of his body and attempted to pull her into the library.

"Unhand me at once!"

To his surprise, her strength exceeded his own, and she pulled back, breaking his grasp on her arm. Darcy was finding the limitations of a woman's body quite frustrating—first the height, now the strength.

Frowning, Darcy lowered his voice, "Miss Elizabeth—you are in my body, and I am in yours. That much is clear. Would you like to discuss this here in the corridor where anyone might hear my body calling 'Miss Elizabeth' my name, or would you like to discern in private what has happened to the both of us?"

Elizabeth contorted his face into one of frustration before she nodded his head reluctantly.

Ducking, she passed by Darcy. "I hope you enjoyed your dance."

Darcy held his breath long enough to keep a retort in. Before following her into the room, he again checked the corridor to assure himself they were not seen and closed the door behind him.

They were suddenly pitched into darkness, no candle having been lit in this room for it was not supposed to be in use. Darcy grappled along the wall in the direction of the mantel.

"Rest easy, Miss Bennet," he said. "I shall have a candle lit momentarily."

"It is so strange to hear your words in my voice."

A chuckle escaped Darcy's lips despite his earlier ire, surprising even himself. "Indeed."

When he reached the mantel, he felt about it for the tin of matches usually placed there but encountered a problem he had not had since he was fourteen years old. He was too short to reach the very back of the mantel! Again with the height!

Begrudgingly, he turned to Elizabeth. "I cannot reach the matches upon the mantel."

"Perhaps I can be of assistance. I have recently grown."

Darcy smiled despite himself at her joke and listened for her quiet approach. He reached a hand out into the darkness to prevent

her running in to him. His hand soon landed upon the firm expanse of her—his—stomach. Elizabeth gasped and jumped backwards.

“Pardon me, Miss Elizabeth. I hoped to prevent such an encounter.”

A hand reached and grasped his own. In that moment he realised he was holding Elizabeth’s hand, and he wished suddenly—with a fervour as had ever seized his heart before—that he could experience it when in his right body.

“Show me the way, sir, and I will use my towering height to assist the damsel.”

Darcy tugged gently at the hand in his, and Elizabeth came closer to the mantel. When she had reached his side, he let go and said, “There should be a tin about the size of a snuff box along the back of the mantel in front of you.”

He heard some shuffling and then the scratch before a burst of light filled the room and dwindled to the dancing flame of a single match. Behind the light, was a triumphant grin on his face—yet, somehow, Elizabeth’s grin.

Swiftly, he found a candle on a nearby table and brought it forth for her to light. In a few minutes, they had lit several of the candles in the room and were able to see each other well enough to be caught again in a stupor over the impossibility of their situation.

“Please take a seat, Miss Bennet.”

Elizabeth complied and sat herself primly on the edge of the sofa, crossing her ankles. The position his body formed was a sight that overcame Darcy, and he burst in laughter. This evening had been long enough, and his mirth was as much rooted in seeing the ladylike posture as in the strain of their circumstances. The sound of the tinkling laugh he loved so well yet produced by him was so strange. Gads! This was a bizarre experience.

“I beg pardon, sir. Tell me what it is you find so humorous about this situation.”

Darcy sobered and looked at the glowering expression on his own face. He really was an imposing sight when he frowned.

“It is only the way you are seated, Miss Bennet. I never sat so ladylike when I had control of my body.”

Elizabeth looked down upon her masculine hands clasped and rested prettily on the knees, and she too began to laugh.

“Old habits, I suppose.” Uncrossing her legs, she attempted the more relaxed posture of a seated gentleman.

Darcy was vastly amused at her efforts but found himself soon the object of her inspection and critique, for he was standing primly, his hands clasped behind his back, back arched and shoulders squared, legs parted slightly—just as he might if he possessed his own frame. Noting the effect his stance had on the curves of his current body, he immediately shifted, uncomfortably curving his shoulders in and wrapping protective arms about himself. His cheeks pinked when he realised how he might look to Elizabeth.



* * *

Elizabeth was no less unsettled by seeing herself moving, laughing, and speaking without her control. She found it very unnerving to try to sit as a gentleman does. Goodness sakes, how did they all not blush to their roots? She settled on a posture that was a mixture of maidenly modesty and masculine comfort.

Recalling their surroundings, Elizabeth tapped her chin—the thought fleeting that it was a very well-formed one—and cleared her throat.

“Just to be clear—you are Mr Darcy within my body.”

“And you are Miss Elizabeth within mine.”

Both inhabitants of the room nodded and were silent.

Darcy took a seat and rubbed his jaw, causing Elizabeth to smile in recognition for having just done nearly the same thing. She watched, mesmerized by it, thinking how strange it would feel to have him touching her face so casually if she were in her natural form. True, she was not feeling his touch as he commanded her body at the time, but the mannerism was so entirely his that immediately she felt her cheeks warm. Her brow raised in surprise when she saw a matching pink fill her companion’s cheeks as if he too felt the intimacy of the act.

“What are we to do, sir?”

“I cannot say. I am still grappling with the changes. The alarm has been such that I have had little presence of mind to think on how or why or what.”

Elizabeth nodded and picked at a bit of lint on her sleeve. Absently, after a moment of uncomfortable silence and without anything of intelligence to say regarding their predicament, she mumbled, “You have fine clothes.”

Her cheeks heated again. *Now why did I say that?*

“I beg your pardon?”

With a shrug of her now broad shoulders, Elizabeth elaborated. Though it furthered her embarrassment, she thought her best chance of recovery from such a blunder was to act as if it mattered little. “The fabric is exceptionally fine. I like the feel of it.”

Darcy blinked, her words unsettling him in some strange way. Elizabeth could not make him out. It was not as if she had insulted him, yet his expression seemed as if he was holding back some great emotion. Elizabeth watched his eyes glaze over as he observed her caress the sleeve of his tail coat. She felt herself grow cross that he received her compliment with little grace. What was he thinking, and why was he acting so rudely?

“I thank you,” he eventually mumbled, looking dazed.

After several painful moments, Elizabeth determined to force him to speak next lest she make another mortifying observation.

“You seem remarkably calm about all this, Miss Elizabeth.”

She sighed. Was she? Elizabeth had never been one to stomp and rage against something over which she had no control, and this situation, so unlike any other she could imagine, definitely fit that description.

“It happened so quickly. Once I realised where I was and where you were”—she accepted unhappily that Darcy would have the satisfaction of seeing her blush again—“I realised quickly that I had to hide this knowledge from others and act normally until a reversal occurred.”

The truth was that Elizabeth was far from settled about their situation. Already, she could feel the stirrings of hunger, which brought to her awareness that at some point other bodily needs might make themselves known to her; the very thought of it sent her into maidenly panic.

She welcomed the distraction when she detected an unusual

fragrance. Darcy looked bemused as Elizabeth breathed into her hand and sniffed.

“May I ask what it is you are doing, Miss Elizabeth?”

Elizabeth was too focused to give much thought towards being embarrassed, for she felt certain she had encountered that fragrance a few times this evening and was determined to find out its source. She breathed again into her hand in search of the aroma.

“I am trying to discern where that smell is coming from.”

“I beg pardon, but I assure you it will not have been my breath, whatever the odour,” Darcy said, offended.

Elizabeth stopped herself, only just, from glaring at him exasperatingly. She began instead to pat down the pockets of her great coat and vest to see whether she could find any hidden treats.



* * *

Darcy watched half-strangled at the sight of his hands roaming over his torso and he could not help imagining Elizabeth doing so with her own hands in her own body. He croaked, “Perhaps I might be of service. ‘Tis my body, and I may have some knowledge of what personal effects are on it, if you tell me what it is you are looking for.”

Elizabeth looked up and queried, “You do not smell that? My grandfather used to eat them. Liquorice treats—they have a very distinctive odour.”

Now that she mentioned it, Darcy did notice the scent. As if transported back to the beginning of this whole mysterious business, he remembered having smelt liquorice and heard a strange laugh. Smelling it now, it was as if his mind was recalling the remnants of that memory with perfect clarity.

“Elizabeth! I remember smelling it right as our switch occurred!”

His companion blinked rapidly at his familiar use of her name.

She appeared on the verge of rebuking him for it, but instead, she turned to him with an earnest expression.

“What do you remember, sir?”

Darcy contemplated her question for a few minutes as he tried to place himself back at the time of the switch. He recounted a situation that Elizabeth said was similar to her own, and they were convinced that the same forces were responsible.

Standing abruptly, he rubbed tired hands over his face for only a second before he was again struck by the petal softness of her face. He struggled mightily, knowing his sanity required he have as little contact with her body as he was able despite being forced to dwell within it.

“The punch!” He fell into the chair again.

“Yes, we both had some! But I have partaken before with no ill result,” Elizabeth stated in frustration.

Darcy looked to the clock and, realising the time, stood abruptly again, forcing Elizabeth to acknowledge that they would soon be missed.

With urgency in her tone, she almost yelled, “We cannot leave without doing something about this!”

“I wholeheartedly agree, Miss Elizabeth. Have you any ideas?”



* * *

Elizabeth stood and began pacing around the room in thought. Briefly, she found humour in the idea that she must look exactly as the owner of this body would in that moment.

Her eyes rested upon the decanter of port kept on a sideboard along the wall. Turning, she pointed to it and addressed Darcy.

“The punch! Perhaps if we both partake again?”

Darcy raised a disbelieving brow. “And what? Think about the other person very hard?”

Elizabeth's long-held composure snapped. "Oh, you infuriating man! Must you always be so condescending and above your company? I am only trying to find a solution while you stand comfortably waiting for others to serve you! How very apt."

Realising then that she was far beyond a little chafing of her good humour, Elizabeth began to grow quite livid. The exhaustion of the evening was so profound that she could no longer hold on to any sense of good grace around such a disagreeable man.



* * *

For Darcy's part, he was a little dumbfounded, offended really, at her blunt words. Despite their situation, he was not inclined to believe that she felt so averse to him. Regardless, his calm had been sorely tested since the switch. It was near impossible to possess the body of the woman he admired so passionately yet keep his thoughts and head above board. Her intemperate display now fuelled his already frayed patience, and Darcy too found himself incensed.

Darcy stood and walked up to her then, tilting his head so he could see into her face. "'Comfortably'? I am not comfortable in this...this pile of bedclothes!"

Elizabeth gasped as he grabbed fistfuls of her new ball gown, lifted it roughly, and tossed it down again.

"And you think I like having this scrap of fabric choking me all evening?" she cried, pointing to her cravat. "And is this how London gentlemen speak of a lady's attire?"

Darcy fumed and paced a few steps away, returning to stand chest to chest with her.

"I want to end this charade as much as you do, Miss Elizabeth, if not more so. How long am I to be assaulted with your bewitching scent and charming frame?"

His words were ground out with anger but it was not long before both he and Elizabeth were colouring at the meaning of his speech. Darcy watched Elizabeth blink at her face, only inches before her, as they had come very close during their confrontation. For a minute they seemed bound by the other's gaze.



* * *

Breaking the connexion, Elizabeth turned her head to the side and saw their reflection in a floor-to-ceiling mirror attached to the wall to distribute daytime light. Darcy turned to see what drew her attention.

There, before them, were two people, standing entirely too close to be proper. Elizabeth, however, could not force her legs to move, for in that instant, she saw herself through his body, and she was struck with both the impossibility of it all and how utterly handsome Darcy was. It seemed absurd that she could have both thoughts, yet they consumed her, fighting for dominance in her mind.

When her gaze left his frame to rest on her own body, she saw in his countenance an expression she could not decipher despite it being on her own face in the mirror. *What is Darcy thinking?* His words returned to her mind, and she was more than a little affected to know he no longer found her merely tolerable. The possibility that he might be thinking the same thing as her and contemplating her beauty, had her taking a step back and turning from him to allow her cheeks to cool. In that instant, she caught a bit of his cologne from the blasted cravat and murmured to herself, "You smell nice too."

When she felt she was composed enough, she turned to Darcy, drawing deeply. "I apologise for my outburst. I find this exceptionally trying."

Elizabeth felt as if she could cry but determined that a man's body must have better resilience as her body failed to respond with any tears.

Darcy walked to the sideboard and poured two glasses. "I must beg your pardon too. It was not proper of me to refer to your gown as bedclothes. This dress is exceptionally beautiful. I thought so as soon as I saw you in it. It is only that I am not used to any hindrance around my legs and feel as if I am trying to walk while wrapped in numerous sheets."

Elizabeth smiled at that and at the embarrassment in his eyes for admitting so. "Despise me if you dare, but I happen to be enjoying having trousers. It is an entirely marvellous feeling to move so easily, to have my legs so free."

The countenance on the gentleman told her she had been too bold; he swallowed thickly as if her words had disturbed him greatly. Elizabeth sighed; it seemed that not only had she lost her body but her control of her tongue and good sense as well.

"Again, I apologise."

Darcy shook his head and simply handed her the drink. "No need. Here, let us try your idea. It cannot hurt anything."

Elizabeth nodded, preparing herself with a large draw of breath. She held her glass to her lips, looked deeply into Darcy's eyes and drank.

They both closed their eyes then, and she stood still, feeling for anything. After a long silence she counted to three in her mind and opened her eyes.



* * *

Darcy somehow knew it would not work, but did not want to take away what little hope she had. When she closed her eyes, he fervently wished he had the power to fulfil both their wishes to

return to their own forms. He watched her eyes open and fill with utter distress.

Reaching for her hand, he walked her to the sofa to seat herself. Then Darcy, disregarding every rule of propriety learned in his life, sat beside her. Together they were silent as each contemplated their impossible situation. Darcy knew Elizabeth to be an intelligent woman and felt she too would begin to consider the long-term problems they each would encounter should this mystical farce continue for any great length. For himself, he had already considered the mortifying possibilities should he have to leave the ball tonight as Elizabeth.

“Come. We cannot be gone much longer. I am sure that there are many who will be missing us.”

He grew concerned when Elizabeth did not stir from where they sat, did not so much as speak. A movement caught his attention, and he found his hand was still in hers. She had turned hers to link fingers with him and the act sent surges of sensation through him. The small movement was like a gift of comfort and soothing as an acknowledgement that they were both languishing under this illogical experience.

Darcy moved his gaze from their hands, which he covered with his other, and up to her eyes. Their eyes locked, and despite the fact that he was looking into his own face and possessed of a much more delicate frame, Darcy experienced a desire so profound to kiss Elizabeth that it literally, physically pulled him towards her.

As if in a dream, Elizabeth watched Darcy lean closer to her. His intent and glazed eyes held her captive. It was a true testament to her state of mind that she found herself almost wishing to know his kiss. Elizabeth blinked and pulled her hands abruptly from his. Standing, she attempted to regulate her breathing as she murmured the need to return to the ballroom.

Darcy nodded and allowed her to leave first. For many minutes longer he stayed in the library considering the great question of whether he was relieved or dissatisfied that Elizabeth left before more might have happened.



Alchemy & Old Friends

I heave a heavy sigh as I watch Elizabeth leave the library. Here I was, floating comfortably upon my stomach with my ankles crossed and hands together supporting my chin, watching these two, vastly amused by their interaction. The odd little ways these mortals adjusted to their bodies and, at the same time, avoided any unnecessary use of them was perhaps the best part of this little experiment.

With a kick, I twirl upright and recline with my hands behind my head as I continue to review the last few minutes in the library with my assignments. For the first time since casting my spell, I had some assurance that it was working. While I most certainly did dose some Attraction upon these two here and there—I cannot recommend this medicinal magic enough with the persuadable humans—I certainly did not use as much as was swirling around the

room before they parted. Good hobgoblin! The bouquet wafting up from these mortals was as thick as my nanna's porridge. No, they were producing a heavy amount of Attraction themselves now. This was all a good sign.

Every Emissary knows the first rules of fate-fixing when it comes to love is that the subjects have to, at the very least, find each other appealing. The continuance of the species depends upon it, and mortals usually depend upon us to start that fascination. Throughout history, the humans have tried to explain it differently, but we know the truth.

A number of years ago, an Arts colleague of mine—a rather mischievous chap—left us all in stitches when he whispered the story of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* into some playwright's ear, filling the human with all kinds of mythical ideas about the fairy world. Steeped in the fantastical, we all enjoyed seeing the mortals latch on to this idea of a cupid of sorts in the character of Puck. There are no such things as cupids in our realm. Just us Emissaries. Still, I am fairly certain there was not a being in my world that did not go to the theatre and laugh throughout when that play came to the stage.

Thinking of my friend's play, I am sobered and reminded of my own recent encounters with Above through the Messenger. My friend also encountered a few raised brows in Above when his play was first performed. Some were concerned that it was too telling of our world and the humans would clue into our existence. What a ridiculous notion to fear. Humans are dense individuals who are by nature pragmatic and unassuming. My mirth bubbles over at the idea that a species so unobservant as they are could ever figure out that we pull the puppet strings in their lives.

The reminder of Above did me no favours though. I need to decide soon what to do with these two mortals, whether to reverse the spell or configure some means by which they could avoid dealing with their human needs. Ugh, humans are such disgusting creatures sometimes.

I watch from above as Darcy stands and briefly smooths the folds of his dress and draws in a steadying breath, his hands going still by his side. My amusement returns, distracting me from the problem at hand. More and more, I am convinced this human is the key to solving all the other assignments on my list. I will have to watch and see what I might do to nudge him where he needs it.

Perhaps right in the backside!

A little more time in Elizabeth's shoes might not be a bad thing for him. He is more stubborn than most humans I encounter. I know I cannot keep their souls switched too long. Spells eventually wear off themselves in time as it is. Contemplatively, again nibbling on my favourite treat, I follow Darcy as he leaves the library to return to the ball.

Before we reach the ballroom, I am surprised and overjoyed to see a former comrade of mine. I have not encountered this jaunty sprite since he was my trainer many hundreds of years ago in Dublin. I am a little torn over whether to follow my assignment into the ballroom or enjoy a conversation with the *seanfhear*. Darcy ought to be all right on his own for a little while—what kind of trouble could he really get into in Elizabeth's body?

"Fabian, sir! Well met!"

My trainer turns at the sound of my voice, and the irritation I've had throughout the evening's events disappears in a flash at the crooked smile of the old sprite. His white hair stands every which way, and his trousers are as they ever were: out of style and too large for his nimble frame. He has a platter of potato candy in his hands, and after popping one in his mouth, he tosses the platter where it fizzles out of existence so he can reach for my hands in greeting.

"Emrys, my son. It is indeed well met."

I cannot help it. His infectious smile gets me, and I am inundated with dozens of memories of this man from when I was in my training days. He is the fairy that's a legend in my calling, and an apprenticeship under his direction was highly sought after. I was privileged to work with him and even more privileged that, after a time, I called him friend.

"What brings you here, old man? I am certain I attended your farewell party and saw you leave for greener glens," I say with mock concern.

The old sprite chuckles, sending a thrill up my spine at the sound.

"Aye, that you did. Here's the trouble with retirement, Em." He pauses, catching my eye with a glint in his own. "It is damned boring!"

We chuckle together for a minute, and he asks me why I am attending this English ball. Sobering slightly, I explain the

frustration over the troublesome assignments I have been given. He nods appreciatively as I recount the block-headed actions of my humans. It feels marvellous to validate my irritations over these two mortals with a dear friend and respected mentor. When I first became his apprentice, he frightened the bedazzlement out of me. It did not take me long to appreciate his capricious nature with its sudden shifts from humour to sobriety, nor the unparalleled wisdom behind them. There wasn't a sprite like him in my entire world.

"I did a thing," I hedge carefully, eyeing my friend, for it has been a long time since I ever considered this man anything else. Unaccountably, I am a little nervous to confess it all.

Fabian's crooked smile appeared again. "I heard whispers just now, but...you?"

With a little cringe of my own, I laugh. "Indeed. I own that I have not worked out the details, but these humans had me this close to inflicting some dark magic on them." I have my fingers raised to pinch the air.

Fabian chuckles lightly and shakes his head. He gestures to the ballroom, and we enter together, drifting as one up to an empty rafter without a spoken word.

I cannot help it, seeing my mentor here seems fate, and I would be a foolish sprite to not take advantage of this moment. "What should I do?"

Fabian settles into his spot near me and eyes me with a smile. "Point out your assignments, and we shall see what there is to do. I am loath to advise you to reverse the spell when, from what I have heard, it has shaken up Above like nothing in years. As all ingenious new ideas do."

You would think that I was some youngling fresh off the petal for I colour at his praise. To compose myself, I pull out some liquorice and share it with my friend. Surveying the room, I first spot Elizabeth in Darcy's body standing about in that stupid manner the gentleman was always wont to do near a pillar. She was obviously trying to draw little attention to herself by acting as the original owner of this body would. I point her out to Fabian, explain a little of her impertinent, prejudiced ways, and then proceed to search about for Darcy.

"You did not say what brings you out of retirement," I say as I look about.

"On occasion, I take up an assignment for the fun of it. I am

allowed to choose the mortal, which is one of the perks of being retired.”

My brow rises as I think of what a nice change of pace that would be and nod my head in appreciation, returning my eyes to the ballroom below.

Fabian continues to speak of his assignment. “My assignment this time is one of the most ludicrous humans I have ever known. He gives me endless entertainment. I have nearly finished with him, and I am a little sorry for it. These old bones have not laughed so much in ages. I have nudged him handily towards a mortal to whom he is supposed to propose.”

I nod my head approvingly. No doubt Fabian has done his work thoroughly and will be soon able to watch his assignment fulfil his destiny with satisfaction. I am not going to lie, I am a little jealous.

“Congratulations, *mo sheanchara*. I am sure you will see him set his destiny in motion soon. Where is this hapless mortal of yours?” I say, curious to see which amusing mortal my friend has been assigned while still scouring for Darcy in Elizabeth’s body.

“I have no doubt he will do his duty and be thoroughly entertaining in the process. Ah now, look over here Em, he is beginning his addresses now.”

I turn to where he is pointing, and I cannot help it. My smile grows large. “Fabian,” I begin, unable to hold back a chuckle. “I believe your assignment is about to declare his feelings to my assignment. And I am fairly certain, old man, that the gentleman occupying Miss Elizabeth’s body is not likely to receive them with pleasure.”

The tinkling laugh of my friend adds to my own. With a snap of his fingers, he produces flutes of champagne for each of us, and with a grin, we clink the crystal together and settle in to watch a most amusing scene.



The Usual Practice of Elegant Females

Darcy looked about for Elizabeth, desiring to stay near her side should they come upon any solution to their confused state. No sooner had he arrived in the ballroom again than he found himself herded into an alcove by Mrs Bennet. Outrage filled his breast at Elizabeth's mother and her manners, along with a growing measure of dread at her nearness.

"Lizzy, dear, there you are. I have been searching about for you for ages!"

Darcy flinched as the matron's ample bosom brushed up against him when she rose to her toes to adjust a curl at his temple. He supposed this was the normal action of a mother but her extreme proximity was distressing. Desperately, he tried to act as he believed Elizabeth would in such a situation with her mother.

He opened his mouth to speak and then stopped, having no idea

what to say to such a woman. How did Elizabeth refer to her mother? He most certainly could not call her Mrs Bennet.

It mattered little for she spoke in rushed tones again, all the while disconcerting Darcy further as she tugged at a sleeve and straightened a belted ribbon. She ended with her hands firmly on his shoulders, eyeing him with surprising focus.

“Lizzy, there is someone who wishes to speak to you, and I have given him my leave to do so.” She removed her hands to clap excitedly, deepening his disquiet. “Oh! I shall go distracted with joy when it is all finished. You stay just where you are and be a good girl.”

With this odd pronouncement, Darcy was further stunned into muteness by the quick peck on his cheek from the matron. It took him a moment to regain his sensibilities from the assault upon his person. Darcy was nearly recovered from the extraordinary encounter with Mrs Bennet—one he would ever recall with a shudder—when he noticed a stout man in ill-fitting clerical garb had joined him in the alcove and stood awkwardly before him.

Darcy stepped one way and the intruder matched his movements. The gentleman appeared to purposely block his exit. Who was this man to prevent Elizabeth from leaving the alcove? What manner of gross impropriety was this? Outraged on both his and her behalf, he squared his shoulders to reprimand the cleric only to notice that Darcy’s actions drew the gentleman’s eyes where they ought not to go!

Darcy stepped to the other side only to find that, to his growing irritation and horror, the gentleman again prevented him from taking his leave. Furthermore, he took upon himself the privilege of grasping Darcy’s hand—Elizabeth’s hand!—in his own. Shocked and outraged, Darcy gained his hand back immediately and, feigning some measure of tranquillity so as to not draw too much attention, spoke firmly.

“Please step aside, sir.”

The unctuous smile bestowed at him now turned Darcy’s stomach, but it was the words out of the mouth of this stranger that enlightened him as to the indignity that he was soon to endure.

“Cousin Elizabeth, my dear, believe me when I say your modesty, so far from doing you any disservice, rather adds to your other perfections.”

Darcy stepped backwards, unbelieving, as he recalled that this

man—was it Coldwell or Collier?—was Elizabeth's cousin, the preposterous gentleman to claim her first two dances and, as Miss Bingley informed him at the start of the ball, the heir to Longbourn.

He attempted a second time to request the vicar step aside so he might leave, only to be again ignored. As a gentleman, Darcy was incensed that this man—a vicar!—believing he was speaking to Elizabeth, was behaving so dishonourably. Looking about him for some sort of escape, and espying the less than subtle eavesdropping of Elizabeth's mother, Darcy realised there would be no discreet way to extricate himself from this encounter without drawing attention that could harm Elizabeth's reputation. He clenched his fists. He might be trapped in Elizabeth's smaller frame, but he still possessed skills from his pugilistic training at Gentleman Jack's if he deemed it necessary. With wary eyes, he turned again to the parson in time to catch part of the declaration Elizabeth's cousin was making.

"...as soon as I entered the house, I singled you out as the companion of my future life. But before I am run away with by my feelings on this subject..."

Hearing this, Darcy's eyes grew large in angry humiliation, and he looked again for a means of escape. A part of him trembled in horror to think of this man addressing his Elizabeth in such a manner. It was impossible that she should be united with this simpleton. Darcy felt a clammy sensation on his hand and, looking down, discovered the parson had once again claimed it.

Quickly he pulled away. "You forget yourself, sir!"

This did little to deter the man, and instead, Darcy found himself obliged to step back deeper into the alcove as the preposterous parson moved closer, his voice pitched low and intimate.

"My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances, such as myself," he said, affecting a modest smile, "to set the example of matrimony in his parish. Secondly, I am convinced it will add very greatly to my happiness. And thirdly, which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady of whom I have the honour of calling patroness, Lady Catherine de Bourgh."

The sudden image of his aunt advising this unctuous simpleton to propose, and unaware that he would obediently execute that assignment to *her own nephew*, took Darcy from anger and outrage

to being so near laughter that he could not use the short pause the parson allowed for any attempt to stop him further, and so the man continued his oration.

“She said to me, ‘Mr Collins, you must marry. A clergyman like you must marry. Choose properly, choose a gentlewoman for my sake, and for your own, let her be an active, useful sort of person, not brought up high, but able to make a small income go a good way. This is my advice. Find such a woman as soon as you can, bring her to Hunsford, and I will visit her.’”

This little speech, Darcy had no trouble believing, was repeated to him verbatim from his aunt, and it sobered him a little. Suddenly, Darcy was compelled to imagine Elizabeth married to this miserable creature and forced to live in Kent near his aunt. He would see her on his annual visits and witness the life drain from her eyes. The image twisted Darcy’s gut, and his hand rested upon the flat stomach of Elizabeth’s body to quell a sudden nausea. His eyes, by force of habit, searched behind the man as best he could. Instinctively, Darcy wished to assure himself she was safe, far from this cretin, yet intellectually, he knew her body was here and in peril regardless. The quick succession of thoughts left him speechless and immobile, not yet able to make his escape.

“...You will find her manners beyond anything I can describe; and your wit and vivacity, I think, must be acceptable to her, especially when tempered with the silence and respect that her rank will inevitably excite.”

Enraged again, Darcy found his vision going red at the audacity of this man to imply that Elizabeth’s ‘wit and vivacity,’ as he put it, ought to be tempered and silenced. This further proof of her vulnerability left Darcy feeling impotent to help her. It was her vivacity that first drew him in. It was her wit that charmed him enough to shift him from admiring to loving her.

All of a sudden, the parson, the over-hot room, and all the other occupants surrounding Darcy were of little notice, for he stood astounded at the realisation that he was in love with Elizabeth. Immediately, he wished to deny it, but the feeling grew so pronounced within his breast that he could do little to temper it. Had a nymph shot him with an arrow to make him fall in love, he could not have been more ambushed by the realisation. He loved Elizabeth, and the thought veritably shattered his regulated life’s plan. Now he could not countenance the idea of leaving her to the

mercy of men like this man—nor any other. No, Darcy could not suffer any other ending than that he would marry her. That she would be his.

Darcy abruptly spoke, startling the parson with the manner in which he regulated Elizabeth's gentle voice. "You are too hasty, sir," Darcy cried. "You forget that I have made no answer. Let me do it without further loss of time."

In that moment, Darcy realised he had no right to refuse on behalf of Elizabeth just because he possessed her body. By that same logic, and to his monumental relief, nor could he rightly accept.

Some distance behind the parson, Darcy's eye was caught by the lady herself; she, in his noble physique, looked on with amused confusion and a little embarrassment. He could tell she did not understand the state of affairs, if Darcy read her expression on his face accurately. Locking eyes, he pled with her to step in and end this tortuous conversation with her cousin. In a gentleman's body, she would be able to command a presence that he could not and persuade the man to stand down—allowing him to leave the matter unresolved since an answer of any sort was impossible.

He watched as she stepped closer, relief flooding through him, until he saw her attention drawn to where her mother was watching, her face alight in eager anticipation for his, or rather Elizabeth's, reply; a reply for which the loquacious cleric was, surprisingly, waiting in silence. Realisation dawned on Elizabeth's features, and Darcy watched her turn to him in horror. She locked eyes with him and shook her head in a definitive negative. Darcy could see the panic in her eyes, the desperation on her—his—face. Awash with relief to know her wishes and be of some definitive aid to her, Darcy communicated his understanding of her desires. What an odd thing to see emotion on one's own face but know that you were not responsible for putting it there.

Incalculably pleased to know that Elizabeth did not wish this union, Darcy was swift to put an end to the notion with a satisfaction he was not ashamed to admit.

He began slowly, being sure to enunciate clearly for the obtuse individual before him and so that Elizabeth could hear his reply on her behalf, "Accept my thanks for the compliment you are paying me; I am very sensible of the honour of your proposals"—here he could not help but clear his throat at the sudden levity that filled it

—“but it is impossible for me to do otherwise than decline them.”

There. It was done, and Darcy could not be happier that he had saved her from such a life. Of course, he was exceedingly pleased that his refusals also served the purpose of opening up the pathway for himself to court her if he could just get back into his own body!

Elizabeth mouthed her thanks to him, and he felt his breast fill with longing for her. His eyes fixed on hers for a moment, and again, he felt that indefinable pull from under his breastbone towards her.

“...It is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept when he first applies for their favour, and sometimes the refusal is repeated a second or even a third time. I am, therefore, by no means discouraged by what you have just said and shall hope to lead you to the altar ere long.”

Darcy’s head snapped back to the vicar, and his eyes widened with alarm. Was this man renewing his addresses despite Elizabeth’s refusal? Disbelieving, he returned alarmed eyes towards Elizabeth, whom he could tell was equally surprised as well as horrified by her cousin’s absurdity. As he watched, the expression on ‘his’ face transformed. Elizabeth raised his brow, and somehow Darcy watched his own features turn up into an impertinent smile too much like Elizabeth would often display in her own body. Before him, he witnessed that saucy smile he had come to love etched on his own face! To his utter disbelief, she then shrugged his shoulders as if to say ‘What can you do?’ and settled in against the wall near enough to listen but clearly without any wish to end this charade.

Cheeky little minx! Darcy thought with a mixture of affection and annoyance. Well, he was Fitzwilliam Darcy, and he would not stand for much more of this. It was time he put a stop to the vicar’s marital ambitions.

“Upon my word, sir,” cried Darcy, in Elizabeth’s offended feminine tones, “Your hope is rather an extraordinary one after my declaration. I do assure you that I am not one of those young ladies—if such young ladies there are—who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of being asked a second time. I am perfectly serious in my refusal. You could not make me happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who would make you so.”

The parson appeared unmoved. “When I do myself the honour of speaking to you next on this subject, I shall hope to receive a more

favourable answer than you have now given me. Though I am far from accusing you of cruelty at present, because I know it to be the established custom of your sex to reject a man on the first application, and perhaps you have even now said as much to encourage my suit as would be consistent with the true delicacy of the female character.”

Darcy could hear the low rumble of his own laughter as Elizabeth leaned against the wall, seeming to the rest of the world as though lost in his thoughts. Darcy could not decide if he was more amused or embarrassed to be subjected to so much devotion from this dolt of a parson. He could not believe the level of foolishness this man willingly pursued, continuing to accost him in this manner. He had been refused, yet he continued on! What would it take for Darcy to finally get the message through to this nitwit? Mr Collins—that was it! Darcy suddenly recalled having been told his name—looked at him with smug superiority.

“Really, Mr Collins,” cried Darcy with some warmth and no little exasperation, “You puzzle me exceedingly. If what I have hitherto said can appear to you in the form of encouragement, I know not how to express my refusal in such a way as may convince you of its being one.”

“You must give me leave to flatter myself, my dear cousin, that your refusal of my addresses is, of course, merely words. My reasons for believing this are briefly these: it does not appear to me that my hand is unworthy of your acceptance or the establishment I can offer would be anything other than highly desirable. My situation in life, my connexions with the family of de Bourgh, and my relationship to your own, are circumstances highly in my favour. And you should take it into further consideration that, in spite of your manifold attractions, it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made you. Your portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo the effects of your loveliness and amiable qualifications. As I must therefore conclude that you are not serious in your rejection of me, I shall choose to attribute it to your wish of increasing my love by suspense, according to the usual practice of elegant females.”

Darcy blinked several times, his mind red hot with rage at the presumption and degradation this man deemed acceptable to utter to the lady whom he wished to marry! What kind of stupidity drove a man to enumerate a lady’s unfortunate station and situation in life

as a means by which to convince her of the sincerity of his addresses? It was neither gentlemanly nor kind.

Darcy looked towards Elizabeth only to see that her amusement at his expense was spent and replaced instead with a clear expression of shame. This added to the fury within Darcy. Elizabeth would receive another offer of marriage despite what Mr Collins believed. And when she was married to him, her connexion to the 'family de Bourgh' would be even greater.

With a deep, calming breath, Darcy prepared himself to speak again to this sycophant. He must compose himself so as to do honour to Elizabeth when he spoke and hoped in doing so to alleviate the burdens under which she was suffering.

"I do assure you, sir, that I have no pretension whatever to that kind of elegance which consists in tormenting a respectable man." Darcy nearly choked trying to speak the lie. "I would rather be paid the compliment of being believed sincere. I thank you again and again for the honour you have done me in your proposals, but to accept them is absolutely impossible. My feelings in every respect forbid it. Can I speak plainer? Do not consider me now as an elegant female intending to plague you but as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart."

"You are uniformly charming!" cried he, with an air of awkward gallantry.

Darcy shook his head in disbelief, but upon seeing Elizabeth slip away, he gave up trying to convince the parson and instead pushed him inelegantly aside as he manoeuvred around him to follow her.



* * *

The tumult of Elizabeth's mind was now exceedingly great. Encountering Darcy in the midst of a proposal from her cousin was horrifying in the extreme, yet knowing avoidance was impossible,

and having gratefully heard him decline on her behalf, there was nothing to it then except relax and enjoy their performances. Darcy's arrogant, disdainful character would do well to endure some humiliation in having to suffer her cousin's heedless denial of the refusal.

It was only after hearing herself degraded in such a manner—compounding humiliation to experience in front of Darcy—that Elizabeth could take it no more and took her leave of the whole encounter. If she had experienced it directly, it would have been merely offensive to her, but to know Darcy had been subjected to it made it all the worse.

Taking advantage of her current height and lengthening her stride, she made her escape as soon as possible. Her pace slowed when she reached the more populated area nearest those dancing, and she stopped to observe absently as her mind twirled in unison with the dancers. A gentle pressure on her arm some moments later caused her to look down at her sleeve where she saw her own lavender silk glove.

Lifting her eyes to meet Darcy's in her own body, Elizabeth kept her face inscrutable. Darcy subtly gestured towards the dancing and Elizabeth, understanding his wishes—and knowing that she needed to, at the very least, thank him for refusing Mr Collins on her behalf—had the unique experience of asking someone for their hand for the next dance for the first time in her life.

As they stood across from each other waiting for the music to begin, Elizabeth studied her partner's expression. The warmth she saw in his eyes was new to her, and still more interesting, was the way it was spreading to her chest, pushing away the indignity and soothing the humiliation. She felt gratitude for Darcy despite knowing that he would forever know to what extent her relations could break with propriety.

Elizabeth had little difficulty adjusting to the gentleman's part in the movements, for when she was younger, she often practised dancing with her sisters. It took little concentration to complete the required duties in the turns and promenades of the dance with Darcy, and allowed her to compose herself for when she spoke to him.



* * *

“I thank you and apologise for what you were forced to...the many mortifications you had to endure on my behalf.”

Darcy smiled at the low timbre of Elizabeth’s voice as she bent her head to speak to him during the dance. Despite spending the better part of the evening in her body, it was still a marvel to experience.

“I am sorry—exceedingly sorry—you were obligated to witness such a scene. I am grateful I could, because of this witchcraft, be a shield of sorts to protect you from your cousin’s pompous assault,” he replied gently, and they were silent for a spell.

Darcy felt his lips lift with hers when she said, “I ought to have intervened, then, instead of forcing you to fend for yourself.”

Darcy replied only with a theatrical shudder.

“Do you believe we will return to our own forms soon?” The pleading in her voice shifted the mood effectively and left Darcy desperate for some solution and wishing to step into her embrace for some comfort of his own.

“I assure you that we will.” Darcy imparted everything he could into this statement. He did not know how or when it would happen, but something told him that it would not be long. Indeed, he felt something different already.



* * *

Elizabeth nodded and for the rest of the dance they spoke very little. For her part, she was reminded of her previous displeasure with Darcy and wondered whether it any longer had merit. Her wounded pride—the smallest of his crimes in her mind, though the first of his offenses—with regard to her being ‘tolerable’ in his eyes had been corrected in the library. Warmth stole through her chest again at the remembered look in his eyes when they stood by each other at the looking glass.

The way he handled Mr Collins had showed her another side of his character. While she still felt he was a good deal too proud, had she not just admitted a certain degree of pride herself? It warranted further consideration on her part.

The only piece of the puzzle that still weighed heavily on Elizabeth’s mind was his behaviour towards Wickham. A degree of reason allowed her to admit that she knew very little of Darcy or Wickham’s characters. However, if a comparison were to be made, she would have to admit favour for the former—her exposure to him had been far more extensive. Elizabeth nearly turned to Darcy then and asked him about Wickham, so confused was she by this incongruence in his character. When she prepared to speak, however, she was reminded of her first dance with him and the way it ended in antagonism, and she was silenced. After his endurance of her cousin’s pomposity, Elizabeth could not subject him again to another distasteful subject. She would simply need to find the answers she sought elsewhere.

The turn in the dance put Elizabeth in line to see Mr Bingley. He could supply whatever information Elizabeth needed, surely. When Mr Bingley raised a satirical eye, Elizabeth’s face formed into a questioning expression. Darcy’s friend nodded subtly towards Elizabeth’s partner and Elizabeth looked at Darcy again. It was then she realised that to the world around them, it would have looked as though Darcy danced only twice at this ball and only with her.

Her dance partner, upon seeing her startled expression, asked what troubled her.

Elizabeth led him off the floor at the conclusion of the dance, whispering urgently, “Sir, are you mindful that by my—by your—dancing with me again this evening, and no one else, that the rest of the assembly will come to...will reach an erroneous conclusion?”

Darcy looked up to her, his eyes shining brightly, and with a squeeze of her hand he said, “Let them speculate.” He winked and

dipped a quick curtsy, leaving her standing open mouthed and not a little discomposed.



Ancient Wisdom

“Well, I am sorry my friend,” I say with a chuckle to my companion. “It looks as though the student has become the teacher.”

My smug grin flashes at Fabian, and he snickers good-naturedly. Though something about his lack of concern dims my triumph over learning my assignment is on track and his has just gone awry.

“It looks as though your mortal has been rejected, poor soul. And for you, my friend, to have one of your humans take such a detour from his destiny...” I shake my head in empathy; I certainly had experienced such setbacks even this evening! “With all your knowledge, I did not expect it.”

Fabian again laughs at my teasing tone. I know that even though he will have more work to do with this mortal given there was no possibility his destiny was connected to Miss Elizabeth’s since hers

was tied to Darcy's, he would take the setback in stride. I admire him for it too.

Fabian does not seem concerned with my words, shaking his head once, finishing his drink, and tossing it aside. With a faint magical chime, it disappears into the ether. He pulls his ledger out of his satchel and signs the bottom of it with a flourish of the silver-inked pen that had appeared immediately in his hand.

Now this is confusing. Why would Fabian sign the book to complete his assignment if Mr Collins was still below, hopelessly single and arguing with Mrs Bennet about it?

"Fabian..."

"I wish you well, Emrys. You are doing superbly with this assignment, and you will certainly find a way to get these mortals on the right path. Sometimes a little ingenuity is required with our mortal friends. If I am not mistaken, you have the gentleman in line already and have only to nudge the lady back to her destiny."

We both glance at my humans below.

"Did you not say that your mortal was destined to propose to Miss Elizabeth?" I ask with confusion.

Fabian returns his book to his satchel, turns to me and pats me on the shoulder. For some odd reason it made me feel as if I was missing something and was the student again.

"Emrys, have I taught you nothing? Yes, Mr Collins was to propose to Elizabeth. I did not say that she was his destiny. You know that better than anyone, since she is Darcy's. But I can see you are the same romantic you always were. I was required only to nudge that Collins fellow to propose to someone who would decline his offer. There are other plans in the works for him. But tell me this: how many assignments do you receive that do not deal with love tapestries?"

I consider his question and realise it is very little. "Only one or two a year, I would say."

He winks at me and, scooting to the edge of the rafter, prepares to jump off. "It is because you are best at them, and Above knows that your Emissary heart is a quixotic one."

I am a little stunned and more than flattered by this compliment from someone I revere. It also gives me a new perspective on Above. I admit, I have oft times had some unflattering impressions of their concern for those of us sprites working among the mortals. Fixing destinies is no easy task. To know Above considered whom

to assign those tasks based on our individual talents was a comforting new consideration.

I grunt absently, still assimilating this new lesson from my old mentor.

Fabian smiles at me knowingly. I did not have to say it. He knows what I feel.

“Take a peek at Section 37, Part G of the Emissary Handbook. Though, from the looks of things, I do not believe you will have need of it. Those tapestries are practically weaving themselves now, eh?”

This gets my attention, and I begin digging in my satchel.

“Take care, Emrys. I enjoyed our little evening together.”

I raise my hand in farewell. My friend snaps his fingers, jumps off the rafter, and transports out of sight. I sit sedately for only a fraction of a second before I quickly pull out my handbook with the zeal of an eager pupil and look up the part that he referenced.

Section G: How to Temporarily Suspend the Physical Processes of Mortals. There, before my eyes was a spell, obscure and rarely used in my calling, that would grant me the ability to—so to speak—turn off those trifling human needs. I could, with this spell, relieve Darcy and Elizabeth from those pesky human maintenance requirements that were so plaguing. I had never considered this option since the spell was used almost exclusively by Creates in the suspension of a lady’s courses to produce a human bairn. I laugh aloud. The tinkling sound, like the tapping on a crystal glass, echoes around the room. Fabian knew of this solution all along and said nothing. Of course he knew. That ancient sprite was a veritable wizard. He was correct however, for now it looked as if it would not take long for these two to align their fates. If I was lucky, it might occur before the night was out.

With a snap of my fingers, I produce a platter full of pixie pears and mallow fruit. I had worked up quite the appetite this evening. I observe Elizabeth and Darcy finish their dance. The smoulder in his eyes was scorching from up here. I could not be more deeply satisfied to see it either.

Just to be sure, I utter the simple spell. It would not do for either one or the other of them to need to use the chamberpot. As Miss Bingley could attest, very little romantic progress was ever made when one was involved.



Gentlemen and Their Concerns

“Let them speculate.”

Elizabeth watched Darcy walk away, still reeling from his provocative words. For some unaccountable reason, for surely she was not developing a *tendre* for the man, his words lingered, giving her senses a zinging riot. The gentleman from Derbyshire had implied he had no objection to the citizens of her county presuming they had an understanding, for gracious sakes!

Her ruminations on the subject, with all the accompanying baffling sentiments, were by necessity put aside when Elizabeth found herself the object of another’s attention. For the first time that evening, she worried she might fail to convince someone that she was Darcy and all was right in the world.

Indeed, Mr Bingley looked at her with bemused curiosity on his open countenance. Elizabeth knew a moment of panic; as Darcy’s

closest friend, he would surely recognise his friend was not the same. Her heart pounded within her chest as they stood peering at each other. She knew her eyes might be wide with barely concealed terror, but nevertheless, she endeavoured as best she could to rein in her emotions to match the brooding countenance Darcy was always wont to show. After too long a moment, wherein Bingley continued his unusually silent yet studied perusal of her, Elizabeth focused her mind to portray Darcy's abrupt manner as she had witnessed between the two men.

"Bingley! Why do you gape at me so?"

This seemed to do the trick, for the gentleman shook his head and let out his usual jovial laugh.

"Darcy, old boy! What have you to say for yourself? I admit, it comes as a bit of a surprise, but then again, you did often look upon her..."

Elizabeth's brows furled, and she cut in as she had seen Darcy do before. "What is this nonsense you speak of, Bingley?"

Bingley's speech halted, and he again eyed her with an amused glint. Nodding to follow him, he turned and walked towards the edge of the room. Elizabeth followed, though she felt as though she would like to be anywhere else. Here was proof that Bingley detected his friend was different. How was she to convince him otherwise?

When Elizabeth joined him near the wall, Bingley smiled eagerly.

"You have been a sly one, Darcy. I think, looking back now with new eyes, I can see that you were quite obvious about it all along. Caroline certainly noticed, and that explains her atrocious behaviour."

Elizabeth was beginning to understand what Bingley was implying, and wishing to lay bare the truth of the matter to him—for Darcy did not admire her—she spoke with alacrity.

"Bingley, you are mistaken if you believe I—"

Her companion's amused chuckle put a stop to Elizabeth's protests as she watched him, with no little alarm, clearly find her speech entertaining.

"Very well, my friend. If you do not yet wish to admit it to your closest friend, then I will not push you. You have quite handily announced it to the ball at large already. You are definitely an amusing fellow now that I see you touched in love, all jitters and

sporadic composure. I, for one, have found it highly entertaining.”

“Bingley...” Elizabeth uttered, wishing to stop him again yet unable to deny the new light shining on many of her encounters with Darcy. He found her handsome, that she now knew, and as Bingley so inelegantly pointed out, he did often engage her in conversation or look upon her with that intense stare of his. Could Darcy have feelings for her?

“Say no more. Say no more. My lips are sealed, and the subject shall not be raised again. Allow me only to say that I think you have met your match with Miss Elizabeth. She is intelligent and kind and honourable. I know no better man than you and am pleased to see you find your equal.”

Elizabeth was rendered mute at this. She knew Bingley would naturally sing his friend’s praises but to say something so absolute about his belief in Darcy’s character left Elizabeth more than a little affected.

“I hope in time I might have the privilege of calling you brother. Although you know I admire Miss Bennet greatly, I am not yet certain she returns my feelings in the matter.”

This caught Elizabeth’s attention, and she turned her head abruptly towards Mr Bingley to see him gazing longingly across the ballroom towards where Jane was speaking with Charlotte. Mr Collins, surprisingly, stood at Charlotte’s side.

“How could you believe she does not return your feelings?” Elizabeth uttered before she could think whether she ought. It was absurdly obvious to her that Jane’s feelings were firmly fixed upon the gentleman standing there.

Bingley looked up at her with something like hope in his eyes. “Do you really believe so, Darcy?”

Elizabeth saw her chance to secure the happiness of a most beloved sister. With a solemn nod, she looked Mr Bingley in the eyes and did her best to assure him.

“Bingley, I have observed her rather thoroughly, and although her character seems to be reserved in expression of her feelings, I am quite convinced that you have the lady’s heart. I suspect she is one of those individuals who shows her feelings little, though is in possession of them in abundance.”

“Just like you.” Bingley said offhandedly, a little dazed at her communication.

Elizabeth turned again to her companion, surprised by the

revelation he unwittingly gave her about Darcy. She realised it also seem an accurate description of him. This conversation was providing her with much to think about with regard to Mr Darcy.

While her gaze was still on his friend, her mind turned about the new information in her head. She did eventually settle matters enough to notice that Bingley was now looking upon her sister with unreserved admiration. Elizabeth was gleeful for the sight and gladdened for her sister.

“What will you do now, Bingley?”

Bingley’s cheeks pinked a tad before he drew breath and squared his shoulders. “What any man ought to do when in possession of such gratifying information.”

Elizabeth, pleased beyond measure, went so far as to raise her hand and pat the shoulder of Mr Darcy’s friend in congratulations. Bingley nodded in acknowledgment, and the two stood quietly, each considering the results of their conversation.

After a few minutes, Elizabeth was surprised to hear Mr Bingley raise another topic.

“I am glad for your sake, Darcy, that a certain member of the militia had the brains to stay away this evening. I did not wish to make your evening unpleasant, yet I could not think of a way to politely excuse him from the general invitation given to the colonel for his soldiers.”

Elizabeth knew immediately he must be speaking of Wickham and did not know what to say, though she wished dearly to pepper Mr Bingley with questions. Darcy would not need to needle his friend for information that he ought to already know.

“Indeed,” Elizabeth muttered, for lack of anything intelligent to say.

“You know it amazes me that Wick—sorry Darcy, I know you detest the very sound of his name—that the individual of which we speak can go about without a care in the world. That he could dare to look you in the eye after the way he slandered your name high and low, speaking all manner of evil against you when you denied him the living.”

Elizabeth gasped and then cleared her throat in hopes that Bingley would not have noticed. Here she had proof that Darcy had denied Wickham the living. She was flooded with all the same indignation she previously held towards Darcy when presented with this confirmation. She tried to attend Bingley, for he was speaking

again.

“Of course you must deny him! You had previously given him ample remuneration in lieu of the living when he declared no desire for the life of a clergyman. I know you said you never believed him to be sincere in his wish to study the law, but I admit I had hopes he had found a profession where he could at last make an honourable name for himself. I must seem to you to be abominably naive.”

Elizabeth grunted, hoping it would suffice for any response as she was too stunned to give any. Her feelings were a tumult of shock and dismay. In minutes, her entire claim to any kind of conceivable perception of the character of either Wickham or Darcy had been laid waste by Bingley.

“And to think you mentioned this was the not the worst of Wickham’s offenses against you.”

Elizabeth again found herself sputtering. “What do you mean?”

Bingley dipped his head in apparent remorse. “I apologise, I ought not to have said anything. You were quite in your cups at the time, late last summer. You said only that Wickham had trespassed again against your family in a most egregious manner. Nothing more, I assure you. You seemed quite distressed at the time. I will not speak of it again.”

Elizabeth’s face must have shown some of the eclipsing emotions she was feeling, for Bingley again apologised and with an awkward tap on her shoulder, he cleared his throat in discomfort.

“Let us speak no more about that man. His absence is a cause for rejoicing, and I should not have allowed his name to besmirch the evening.” Bingley regained his usual amiable mood and turning towards Elizabeth, continued, “I will leave you now, Darcy. This ball is nearing its end, and I wish to be near Miss Bennet’s side when her carriage departs so I might have the honour of handing her up.”

Elizabeth nodded at Bingley, her features turned up in a small smile to hear him speak thus about her sister. Bingley, gladdened by proof that his speaking of Wickham had not ruined the evening for his friend, smiled wide and strode off to find Jane.

Elizabeth watched him weave between guests until she was startled by the appearance of Mr Darcy. All the new intelligence about his character, about Wickham, and about his feelings for her as far as Bingley saw them, came rushing back to her mind. She

eyed him, returning the steady gaze he gave her. Her eyes travelled to the pile of chestnut curls on her head and chuckled at their strange situation.

"Miss Elizabeth, I have been remiss in telling you that you look beautiful this evening," she said to Darcy with a hint of cheek.

Her companion laughed, the tinkling sound reaching her ears and adding to her amusement. "I thank you, Mr Darcy. I might as well take the opportunity to return the compliment and say that you are dashing in your black evening wear. I have never seen anyone look so handsome in all my life—"

Elizabeth erupted in laughter. The sound of the deep rumbling cutting off his impertinent speech.

The two of them stood near each other in companionable silence for a time before it was interrupted by Darcy's sombre tones.

"All Bingley said is true."

Elizabeth turned and met his eyes. She was pulled into their depths as she sorted his statement with all the topics she and Bingley had discussed. She wondered how long Darcy might have been standing nearby to overhear. Tilting her head, she realised that despite the fact that she was in essence looking at herself, the eyes gazing back at her seemed to resemble Darcy's. She wondered whether the chocolate colour of her own eyes could be seen in Darcy's face.

Darcy held her gaze and whispered then, "Everything my friend spoke of, Elizabeth."



Enchantments

The chime at my hip nearly knocks me off my perch, so unexpected and startling is the sound. I look around to see if any other sprites see my inelegant movement, and I am certain my cheeks are as ruby red as field strawberries. I see only the slight smirk of a nearby Emissary and resign myself to my folly. I admit I got quite caught up in watching the endearing little humans below.

Yes, I said endearing. Of course it is easier to be in charity with them when I see them willingly choose the correct path. My heart warms at the scene below as I settle in again straddling the rafter. Darcy can be quite the charmer should he put his mind to it. I can see it is taking very little effort at all on his part to turn Elizabeth up sweet.

If I did not know the brilliance of her mind, I might have wondered whether she was not a little too vain. I know, however,

that she now was finding herself bewitched by the gentleman, and his admiration was beginning to do its work on her mind, allowing it to open up to possibilities she never would have dared think before.

I am unwilling to take my eyes off the charming scene below, which just affirms what I have always known despite my earlier grumbling this evening: I am an Emissary. True, right down to my bones; this is the part for which I feel the most affection towards the wee little beasties standing below me. They sure can be infuriating, but when they do what they ought, there is no greater feeling of good wishes from me for their happiness.

With effort, I tug my eyes away to pull out my book from the satchel. I must attend to the chime notification that nearly caused me to disgrace myself. My book opens immediately to the page with my list of assignments, and I see with a twitch of my lips that Above has stamped through the names of Mr Bingley and Jane.

I nearly forgot about those two. Looking about, I spot them on the side of the room, speaking in close conference with their cheeks aglow. The musicians have just finished for the evening, and the remnants of their notes still hang in the air. The rest of the humans below celebrate together the culmination of a successful and enjoyable evening, leaving Bingley and Jane entirely unnoticed where they stand. With a glance at Darcy and Elizabeth, their cheeks also suspiciously brightened, I flick an added dose of Attraction their way for good measure as I fly over to settle just above Bingley and the eldest Miss Bennet.

For all my frustration expelled earlier when these two were added to my list, I have given them very little thought, and that makes me feel a little negligent in my duties. I do not dwell long on those feelings, as I detect from the gentle words wafting up to me that Miss Bennet has just secured her fate by agreeing to Bingley's proposal to weave their tapestries. No wonder their names had been stamped by Above. With a flourish and a contented grin, I pull out my notebook, and when my own silver-inked pen appears in my grasp, I sign my name beside theirs to complete the assignment and return it to Above.

Although I know they do not need it, I sprinkle a little bit of Happiness on the newly betrothed humans below and watch as Bingley, more jubilant than I have ever witnessed him, departs hesitantly from his beloved and seeks to speak to Mr Bennet nearby.

Just like that, I count another job well done, amused now at how very little work it required of me.

I chew happily on a piece of liquorice as I smugly return to the rafters above my other two humans. I have to admit that in all my years as an Emissary, no two mortals have ever required so much of me yet in the process secured so much of my affection. No, I suppose Above had it right about these two, else I would not feel so warmed by their growing inclination for each other.

The humans below cease their excited chatter and turn towards the sound of Bingley standing upon the musicians' dais to gain their attention. To the side of him, I spy a blushing Miss Bennet near her father and know he soon will be announcing their interweaving.

I have never understood this aspect of human connexions. The ceremony of it all still strikes me as odd. When a sprite in my world decides to weave their tapestry with another, we simply do it and let the eternities begin. Humans need to share the news with others. Oft times, there follows a baffling waiting period in which, I admit, the Attraction flows to unsettling degrees and must be observed lest some interesting developments occur. And then, finally, the humans will gather together in some sacred ground and weave their tapestries. It is all quite unnecessary in my mind. Once you have decided to follow your fate, why stand around talking about and planning it? Just weave it already! Alas, I am not human, and their ways are as ever a mystery to me despite all my years influencing their feeble minds.

As Bingley makes his little speech, beginning this silly mortal ritual, I turn my attention to Darcy and Elizabeth. I am pleased to see this time that the gentleman is not unhappy with the prospect as he was earlier in the evening when Bingley and Jane's names first appeared on my list. This little experiment of mine to switch their souls has proved to work its magic further afield than I had anticipated.

The room erupts in exultation at the news of Miss Bennet and Mr Bingley's engagement. I see now that Bingley has instructed footmen to deliver punch to everyone for a toast to their weaving of tapestries.

As Darcy and Elizabeth each receive a glass, I know what is on their minds; I can tell from their expressions that they both remember vividly what happened to them the last time they partook of the sweet beverage. A fit of humour engulfs me, and I

am besieged with laughter. I suppose it is time I set them to rights, and what better way than to make them believe the fruity punch is to blame.

I wait until they lock gazes, lifting the crystal to their lips before I dust them again with the magic iridescent sealing powder and pronounce the necessary words.

*“Fate’s path you now have learned.
A lesson you must not e’er waste;
Your soul again is yours, now earned.
Be prepared for two souls replaced.”*



New Beginnings

The flash of pain was as brief as before, yet he had barely begun to feel it before examining himself eagerly to see its result. His eyes exultantly roamed over the black linen-covered expanse of his wide shoulders and long legs and the comforting return of his leather dancing pumps. Triumphant laughter bubbled up from his throat, thrilling him to hear the sound was at the proper pitch for a man's voice. His eyes flew to Elizabeth beside him to see her just as thrilled to be once again occupying her own body and no longer trapped within his.

The sight of her brilliant eyes, sparkling and elated, drew Darcy's breath and ceased his laughter. She too was in a celebratory frame of mind, laughing disbelievingly to herself. Her obvious relief and joy at this unexpected, though not unwelcome, return to order rendered her countenance exquisitely beautiful.

All around them, guests were celebrating and speaking excitedly about Bingley's engagement to the jewel of their neighbourhood, Miss Bennet; Darcy was thrilled to see his and Elizabeth's exuberance appeared in line with theirs, though for entirely more personal reasons.

"Miss Elizabeth," Darcy murmured near her ear.

Elizabeth met his eyes, and he nearly reached to pull her in. "It is a wonder, is it not, sir?"

"Indeed," Darcy said, patting himself down absently, assuring himself once again that he possessed the right frame.

They both lifted their glasses and eyed them warily. When a footman, misinterpreting their raised gestures, came over with a pitcher to fill their glasses again, both Elizabeth and Darcy immediately took action.

"No!" they spoke loudly and in unison, startling the poor man.

"I thank you, but the lady and I have had sufficient," Darcy quickly interjected to smooth over their outbursts.

Elizabeth began to laugh as the footman bowed and walked off, rolling his eyes at the strange ways of the gentry.

"So it was the punch all along."

Elizabeth turned to her companion with a shake of her head, sending her curls bouncing a little side to side.

"I wish that were true, or we might have found ourselves put to rights sooner, sir." At his confused look, she added, "I sought out a measure of it as soon as I left the library, and as you know, nothing happened."

Darcy was too elated to care much about what produced the desired switch; he was focused on the good fortune that it had occurred before he was forced to return to Longbourn with the Bennets for the evening. Seeing as many of the guests were now taking their leave, and knowing that Elizabeth was soon to depart as well, Darcy felt urgency come upon him, and he turned once again to the woman for whom he felt an all-encompassing passion.

"Miss Elizabeth, I hope we have become friends, at the very least, after our bewitchment this evening." Encouraged by her pinked cheeks and gentle nod, he continued. "You said earlier, after our second set, that there may be some repercussions to the attention I gave you this evening. May I hope that they will not distress you?"



* * *

Elizabeth was quiet as she searched the depths of his eyes. The sincerity and warmth radiating from them settled into her a feeling of desire to know him more. Her feelings for him had undergone so profound a change over the course of the evening that she knew they could not now be denied. The realisation settled in her throat however, preventing her from anything more than another nod. The pleasure now displayed on his face was quite becoming of his handsome features, and Elizabeth found she was forced to look away lest she give away some of her feelings towards him.

“Will you allow me to call on you tomorrow?”



* * *

Darcy held his breath, knowing that she would correctly interpret this request as it was meant—that he wished to court her and pursue her as her suitor. To his mind she took entirely too long in answering, and he almost despaired that, despite the unique understanding of each other that was achieved through their unexplainable displacement, she may not welcome his suit.

“I would be pleased to receive you, Mr Darcy,” was her soft reply.



A Little Indulgence

I am not surprised to see my friend settle into the spot beside me, though truth be told, I am a little embarrassed to be caught where I am. It is highly unusual for one of our kind to attend such a mortal event. It is not necessarily frowned upon, though it does raise a few eyebrows. I suppose the sentimentality of it all leaves others bemused. It is unlike most sprites to get attached enough to their mortals to bother returning to see them again after the assignment is complete. To be known to be so soft-hearted makes me squirm a little on the hard wood beam I had settled on.

Fabian turns to me with affection in his eyes, doing little to make me feel less mortified to have been caught. I had hoped to slip in and out quickly enough to stay out of the notice of the other sprites going about their duties among the mortals assembled below. I know I have long finished with these humans and ought to get on with the holiday recently granted from Above. Mystic knows,

I have earned it; the specific humans I am watching underline that fact.

Why, oh why did I return to attend their mortal ceremony? I am kicking myself. With a jaundiced eye towards the humans below, I note with some satisfaction that the hard wooden pews the humans are seated upon are no more comfortable than the beam numbing my own backside.

“You may gloat all you want, Fabian. I happened to be in the area and decided to drop in, that is all.”

Fabian chuckles, not believing a word of the fairy tale I just told. He knows me better than that, and at times like this, I wish he did not. My pinked cheeks can attest to that.

“They will make a very interesting life together, I think. Humans like these are apt to leave an indelible mark on Emissaries like us.”

His understanding goes a long way to soothing me, and I decide to own my sentimentality a tiny bit more. Darcy and Elizabeth, standing beside Bingley and Jane, begin reciting their mortal vows. I smirk at the earthborn below. They place such meaning on this cute liturgical rite.

To be honest, a small part of me admires the wee beings and their sacrosanct rituals. There is something to be said about declaring in front of God and witnesses that they are joined together. A little superfluous to be sure, but endearing.

“For Puck’s sake,” I spout, seeing as we have been joined by yet another sprite. Fabian was one thing, but was I to endure the teasing of all my colleagues over this moment of mawkish weakness? I foresee my professional reputation gone in a poof of magical dust. I should never have returned to see Darcy and Elizabeth’s wedding, I tell myself again. I should live this down in a hundred years.

“Hello to you too, Em.” Chuckling, Alasdair ignores my unseemly outburst.

“He is not here to embarrass you, Emrys,” Fabian interjects before I can retort, and seeing that now I believe it is he telling the fairy tales, he continues, “He is here on official business.”

Alasdair, barely containing his mirth, affirms this.

“What official business could you have here, Messenger, unless... No! I have rightfully earned this holiday.”

He silences me with a lift of his hand. “I am only here to report to Above on the little event below, Emrys. With such a notable

journey towards correcting their destinies, Above has been keenly watching this pair.”

I cross my arms, chagrined and irritated that he should have such a reasonable explanation to be here and thus encounter me in this moment of almost humanlike sentimentality. I wish I could cast a forgetting spell on Alasdair and Fabian, but alas, spells do not work on other sprites.

After indulging in my fit of pique a while with the help of several pieces of liquorice, I calm down enough to decide I would be better served to just embrace my romanticism. It is what makes me a good Emissary. The ceremony below is coming to a close, and I listen to the parson declare the tapestries woven for my darling little mortals. They, of course, use the human word, married. This is my favourite part, and my smile is a genuine one. As the earthborn begin making their way outside the church, my attention is drawn to my companions as they discuss the mortals.

“Is it true that Darcy and Elizabeth will not have punch at their wedding breakfast?”

This produces a short chuckle from me. I had heard that too. These mortals were always so predictable and having spicy punch at a wedding breakfast was as expected as having the mother of the bride indulge too much of said drink at the event. That overindulgence inevitably led to some very amusing mishaps, often requiring one or more sprites to step in. These tales frequently became legend and formed the stories we told our wee ones about the mortals below. They never failed to charm a young sprite out of the pain of a skinned knee or stolen rosebud.

I suppose I ought to feel badly for Darcy and Elizabeth that they would not have this traditional celebratory drink at their tapestry weaving. Instead, it amuses me to no end that they seem to not wish to tempt fate. Silly humans, you cannot tempt fate. It has already been decided for you.

An Deireadh
The End

The author and publisher hope you have enjoyed this book. The favor of your [REVIEW](#) is always appreciated.

Acknowledgments

When I had my youngest kid, an indefatigable man-child, my whole world fell a little upside down. After three girls who were precious little angels and would sit contentedly by my feet while I escaped into the therapeutic world of writing, I had birthed the archangel of destruction.

Abegeddan, as we lovingly called him, kept me from writing since it's therapeutic effects were largely lost if the house was on fire. But he was my baby and had the cutest dimples and I couldn't really blame him for the things his curious mind led him to discover (albeit via mayhem and chaos).

Before I knew, it had been years since I had done any serious writing. So I must give thanks to a few people who, now that the little tyrant is less of a handful, kept encouraging me to write again. These people do not know what worries I had, insecurities developed from being away from a passion for so long, yet their support helped my muse from going entirely cold.

Christina Boyd must be acknowledged for encouraging me to write over the years through her amazing short story anthologies. It was always an honor to be asked to participate especially with all the exceedingly talented authors out there.

Lastly, and most profoundly, I want to thank my publisher, Quills & Quartos, who not only lent me confidence when mine was lacking but pushed me back into writing in a way that helped me to rediscover why I loved this pastime so much.

For all those moms out there, with tiny tyrants of your own, who may be reading this novella as a means of escape—I nod my head to you. Keep fighting the good fight.

About the Author

KaraLynne began writing horrible poetry as an angst-filled youth. It was a means to express the exhilaration and devastation she felt every time her adolescent heart was newly in love with “the one” and then broken every other week. As her frontal lobe developed, she grew more discerning of both men and writing. She has been married to her own dreamboat of a best friend, Andrew, for 17 years. Together they have the migraine-inducing responsibility of raising five children to not be dirt bags (fingers crossed), pick up their socks (still a work in progress), not fight with each other (impossible task) and become generally good people (there’s hope). She loves escaping into a book, her feather babies (the regal hens of Cluckingham Palace), and laughter.

She has written four books and participated in many anthologies including: *Falling For Mr Darcy*; *Bluebells in the Mourning*; *Haunting Mr Darcy: A Spirited Courtship*; *Yours Forevermore, Darcy*; *The Darcy Monologues*; *Rational Creatures*; and *Sun-Kissed: Effusions of Summer*.

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Also by KaraLynne Mackrory

Falling for Mr Darcy

The simple truth is proven that sometimes a gentleman never knows his heart until a lady comes along to introduce it to him. When Mr Darcy encounters Elizabeth Bennet injured after a fall, his concern for her welfare cracks the shell of his carefully guarded heart, and a charming man emerges. Elizabeth sees an appealing side of him she never believed possible from the stoic, proud master of Pemberley. They find the simple gentlemanly act of assisting her home will test both Mr Darcy's resolve to keep his heart safe and Elizabeth's conviction that this is the last man on earth she might have ever been prevailed upon to marry. Soon, falling for Mr Darcy becomes a real possibility.

Haunting Mr Darcy - A Spirited Courtship

2015 IPPY Bronze Medal Winner in Romance

What happens to the happily ever after when the ever after has already happened? A "spirited" courtship indeed! Jane Austen's much adored *Pride & Prejudice* is transfigured in this Regency adaptation. That fickle friend Fate intervenes when an unexpected event threatens the happily ever after of literature's favorite love story.

The gentlemen from Netherfield have left, winter is upon the land, and after a horrifying carriage accident, Elizabeth Bennet finds her spirit transported as if by magic into Mr Darcy's London home. Paranormally tethered to the disagreeable man, it doesn't help that he believes she is a phantasm of his love-struck mind and not the real Elizabeth. Somehow they must learn to trust, learn to love and learn to bring Elizabeth back to her earthly form before it is too late.

Bluebells in the Mourning

Jane Austen's beloved *Pride & Prejudice* is readapted in this regency tale of love in the face of tragedy. Mr Darcy is thwarted in his attempt to propose to Elizabeth Bennet at Hunsford when he encounters her minutes after she receives the sad news from Longbourn of her sister's death. His gallantry and compassion as he escorts her back to Hertfordshire begins to unravel the many threads of her discontent with him. While her family heals from their loss, Darcy must search London for answers – answers that might

bring justice, but might also just mark the end of his own hopes with Elizabeth. Is it true that nothing can be lost that love cannot find?

Yours Forevermore, Darcy

Mr Fitzwilliam Darcy has a secret. The letter he presented to Miss Elizabeth Bennet after his ghastly proposal is not the only epistle he has written her. In this tale of longing, misadventure and love, Jane Austen's dearly loved *Pride & Prejudice* is readapted as our hero has learned a powerful way of coping with his attraction to Miss Bennet. He writes her letters. The misguided suitor has declared himself, and Elizabeth Bennet has refused him, most painfully. Without ever intending for these letters to become known to any soul, Mr Darcy relies on his secret for coping once again. However, these letters, should they land in the wrong hands, could amount to untold scandal, embarrassment and possibly heartbreak. But what would happen should they fall into the right hands?